

BELARUSIAN REVIEW

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In this issue:

EDITORIAL

Regime Marches On

The beginning of the year marked an apparent even if not momentous international success for the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Belarusian government agreed to open on 1 January an OSCE office in Minsk to replace the former OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group, which was furiously criticized by the Belarusian president in the past and de facto expelled from the country. The new OSCE mission in Minsk seems to have been downsized not only in its status (an office, not a group) but also in its mandate in comparison with the former group led by German diplomat Hans Georg Wieck.

Reportedly, the OSCE office's mandate is to "assist the Belarusian government in further promoting institution building, in further consolidating the rule of law, and in developing relations with civil society in accordance with OSCE principles and commitments." Skeptics point out that the expression "institution building" lacks the crucial adjective "democratic," while the general sense of this description suggests that the OSCE new mission is now to reach civil society in Belarus "via the government" rather than directly. In other words, in Belarus' over-regulated and over-controlled society, Lukashenka seems to have substantially restrained contacts of his compatriots with international community while projecting the appearance of an internationally collaborative and democratically minded politician.

Furthermore, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly voted in February to seat the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus as a full member. It seems that many European lawmakers were, after six years of wrangling, tired of the "Belarusian problem" and accepted the Chamber of Representatives formed in elections that were internationally deemed neither free nor democratic.

While this acceptance was an obvious setback for the opposition, it is not clear for the time being who, if anybody at all, will benefit from it. The government reacted to this decision by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly with an apparent ban on reporting and commenting on it in the state-controlled media. It is not difficult to guess why: Lukashenka must have been quite irritated by the fact that the subservient legislative body with symbolic powers has been given a sort of international recognition while he, the real ruler of Belarus, is remaining internationally isolated, in particular, by a demeaning travel ban imposed by 14 EU governments, the United States and other European countries. Several legislators from the *Respublika* group in the Chamber of Representatives have recently made some statements suggesting that they do not necessarily agree with Lukashenka's policies (and even organized a forum with the participation of opposition activists) but these moves, even if symbolically important, may prove to be fruitless. Lukashenka immediately ordered the KGB, police, and prosecutors to "introduce proper order" regarding "two or three lawmakers" who, he said, are seeking to destabilize the country.

The most conspicuous of recent political developments in Belarus, no doubt, were the 2 March local elections which, according to tradition, began five days earlier. It was during this essentially unmonitored period that more than 20% of the electorate was "encouraged" to vote. The Central Election Commission reported promptly on 3 March that the elections were a huge success, with turnout exceeding 73 percent. Some officials even went on to say that the elections marked a crucial step in "building civic society" in Belarus. But this thread of reasoning has not been officially pursued. And indeed, what progress in civic-society building may be claimed in the situation where in 93 percent of constituencies election was without choice, that is, there was only one candidate to vote for? On the other hand, however, the Central Election Commission headed by Lidziya Yarmoshyna demonstrated to President Lukashenka one more time that she is in full control of a well oiled administrative machinery set to produce any election results the government wants.

To guarantee the desired results, two main approaches were used. In over 22,000 districts the appearance of a single officially approved candidate was assured by the inability of democratic groups with their pitifully meager resources to field many candidates. And most of those that were fielded were disqualified during the registration or were forced to withdraw by threats of job loss in areas where there are no other jobs available. To ensure the required 50% turnout, the local officials herded the voters to the polls especially during the early voting period.

In large cities where the democratic opposition focused its effort, the regime's approach was different. In Minsk, where all polls indicate that a majority opposes the regime, not one of the 55 seats on the City Council will be filled by opposition. Here, on the average, three candidates per district ended up on the ballot, with those democratic candidates deemed the strongest having been disqualified during registration. The early voting abuses completed the process.

> **The one bright spot is the fact the most of the democrats elected were young people who exhibited no fear in contacting the voters in person**

The election performance of the Belarusian opposition — which returned this year to grassroots politics after boycotting the local election in 1999 and the parliamentary election in 2000 — is a matter of grave concern. It won only 100-200 seats, or less than 1% of the total (the exact number is difficult to determine at this time, since many opposition candidates ran as independents in order to avoid being targeted for early disqualification). The one bright spot is the fact the most of the democrats elected were young people who exhibited no fear in contacting the voters in person.

They learned to organize campaign teams that not only worked hard for their candidate but were also vigilant in minimizing electoral fraud.

Two immediate conclusions can be made from Belarusian developments of the recent months. First, there is widespread fear and political inertia at the grassroots level of society, which makes it very easy for the government to orchestrate political processes and to restrain genuine reformist efforts. Second, the Belarusian opposition remains weak at the local level, where it has generally failed to build up support for its cause. However, even given this weakness, **the current opposition remains the only alternative to the authoritarian regime. Therefore, the democratic international community should not give up providing both moral and material support to the Belarusian opposition, rather it should increase it and make it more focused. Otherwise, the Belarusian regime, which has gained enormous experience in simulating democratic processes, may well resort to "simulating" opposition as well, by replacing the current opponents with "virtual" ones.**

Jan Maksymiuk

David Marples Honored

Dr. David Marples, our longtime contributing editor, has been named one of the winners of the 2003 University of Alberta Gordin J. Kaplan Award for Excellence in Research. The ceremony took place on March 5, 2003 and the *University of Alberta Express News* wrote:



Dr. David Marples

"A specialist in Eastern European studies, Marples rose to prominence by studying the many aspects of the 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl. His current research focus is the mysterious murder of thousands of people during the mid to late 1930s. Their graves were discovered in the Kurapaty forest in Belarus.

The research has taken Marples to the national archives in Minsk, where he is only the third foreigner to be granted access to study. From interviews and reviewing documents, Marples believes Soviet secret police murdered the peasants, though the official version of the story as recited by officials in Belarus says Nazi Germans are to blame.

Marples continues to work to uncover irrefutable facts. His academic record suggests he will succeed. He has authored eight books and has been published extensively in academic journals and in the mainstream media..."

From the Publisher

In this first issue of *Belarusian Review's* Volume 15, we wish to thank our subscribers for continued support. Special thanks go to those who contributed additional funds which made it possible to provide complimentary subscriptions to government officials, political leaders and research institutions around the world, thus making them aware of the situation in and around Belarus.

A vote of appreciation is also due to the editorial and administrative staff that performed all the needed tasks with dedication and efficiency. They did it without compensation just with the knowledge that their effort will help Belarus to join the family of respected and democratic nations.

Our thanks go to the various institutions that allow us to reprint their material and to our valued contributing editors.

The names of **Vital Silitski** and of **Uladzimir Rouda** have been added in this issue and our long time contributor **David Marples** has just been honored by the University of Alberta (see a related article).

The subscription costs remain unchanged for 2003: $45 for individuals, and $65 for institutions. Many readers have already renewed their subscription, for others – a reminder is included in this issue. Last year's Volume 14 consisted of the regular four quarterly issues, with a *Special issue* devoted to alerting the world community to renewed danger of creeping annexation by Russia. With your help, *Belarusian Review* will stay vigilant in support of independence and democracy in Belarus.

Many of our readers in United States have written or called their Representatives urging them to cosponsor and support Bill H.R. 854 "Belarus Democracy Act of 2003" (for the intent of this bill, see the article by its initiator - Congressman Christopher Smith) To ensure the passage of this bill, our campaign must not only continue, but intensify.

1 = 10 is the desired formula !

That means that every **one** of our readers who contacts their Representative should encourage **10 others** from among their friends, relatives, neighbors and coworkers to do the same.

An almost identical bill, S.700 "Belarus Democracy Act of 2003" has just been introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell. Senators Richard Biden and John McCain have joined him as cosponsors at the time of this writing.

All our readers are urged to contact their Senators, asking them to cosponsor this much needed bill.

FEATURES

Local Elections in Belarus

An example of provincial authoritarism

By Uladzimir Rouda

It is generally known and accepted that an authoritarian regime conducts elections not in order to use them as a guide in forming legislative and executive structures, but in order to enhance its own legitimacy, to involve the population, and as a test of the efficacy of the state rule throughout the country.

Viewed in this context, the results of the local elections of March 2003 could, on the whole, be considered a success for the ruling regime in Belarus. Even though the local councils (soviets) were made powerless by Lukashenka already in 1995 through the establishment of 'vertikal'- a statewide structure appointed by and responsible to him personally - the elections themselves were important to the regime. The fact that they were held was intended to demonstrate to the international community that everything is fine in Belarus: local self-government exists and the people do elect their representatives.

The elections themselves were not a major event for most Belarusians and many inhabitants of the larger cities simply ignored them. However, the authorities have long since learned how to deal with low participation, namely by pressuring people to vote or by appropriately juggling the voter lists. According to a statement by the Secretary of the Central Election Commission the overall turnout was 73.4% of the electorate. In some districts a turnout exceeding 90%, just like in the Soviet times, was reported. The level of cynicism on the part of governmental bodies that ran the elections has set new records. Local officials at all levels were pressuring people to vote in the pre-election period. It is during this period that effective monitoring by independent observers is almost impossible. The percentage of voters during this period was 20.7%, considerably exceeding the 13% that voted early in the last presidential election. The number of invalidated ballots – three times greater than during the presidential election – is also generally associated with a high likelihood of result falsification.

Cynicism on the part of governmental bodies that ran the elections has set new records

The ability of the nomenklatura to use the administrative resources at its disposal to the fullest during this 'expression of the will of the citizens', did more than meet the expectations of top regime leadership. For Lukashenka, these local elections were primarily a rehearsal in advance of the upcoming referenda, one dealing with the adoption of the Constitutional Act of the so-called Union State of Russia-Belarus, the other with changes to the Belarusian Constitution that would extend his term of office. Belarusian officialdom has thus again demonstrated its unswerving loyalty to Lukashenka, regardless of the substantial differences between their particular interests. Belarusian nomenklatura is not at all happy with Lukashenka's policies. It would prefer, similarly to their colleagues in the neighboring states, to openly participate in the conversion of their authority into personal wealth. They dream of massive privatization, of legitimizing their status as the ruling class. They are tired of being the whipping boys in that popular people's show: "Batska (father figure Lukashenka) maintains order by putting overzealous bureaucrats in their place". There is no comforting stability, since Lukashenka constantly shuffles around his appointed officials. But alas, as unhappy as the bureaucrats might be, they appear unable to play an independent role in present day Belarus. The past local elections have confirmed this fact yet another time.

Let us review some reasons for this situation:

Firstly, the current Belarusian officialdom does not fit the criteria for a functional bureaucracy described by the German sociologist Max Weber; one that is interested in promoting the rule of the people, and whose existence is one of the pre-conditions of democratization. The administrative and economic leadership rather resembles the Soviet bureaucracy with its subservience to the top leadership, its abusive treatment of regular citizens, its low professionalism and competence. As a special interest group, it is not interested in democracy, since it fears the resulting competition. It doesn't know how to operate using clearly defined political procedures, but which do not offer guaranteed results. This bureaucracy wishes to retain an authoritarian regime not with its current personality rule, but rather, in the form of an oligarchy.

Secondly, the political system which developed in the Republic of Belarus after the 1996 constitutional coup is defined by a low level of institutionalization. This results in very limited autonomy of both the central governmental structures as well as those on the periphery. The officials appointed to slots in the vertikal do not exercise the least independence. Their official position, their career hopes and potential privileges depend totally on their loyalty to the president and on his view of them. That explains the subservience, personalized loyalty, the utter lack of initiative, and the excessive timidity of the current bureaucracy. Of course, there are exceptions, but they only confirm the general rule.

The democratic opposition needs to take this into account and not place especially great hopes on a 'quiet revolution' by the nomenklatura against Lukashenka. Such a revolution is likely to happen only when it becomes obvious that the balance of forces has shifted substantially in favor of the anti-dictatorial movement.

After having boycotted the 1999 local elections and the parliamentary elections in 2000, the opposition chose to participate in the 2003 local elections with the sole exception of the Conservative Christian Party of Zyanon Pazniak. The political atmosphere was generally more favorable to the democratic forces than was the case during the presidential elections in 2001. According to data collected by the

NOVAK polling group in November 2002, the majority of Belarusian voters were ready for the first time since 1994, to vote for opponents of Lukashenka in local elections. It should, however, be noted that over 60% of the voters were not ready to support any particular political party, a circumstance which testifies to the low level of party identification within the Belarusian society, a condition not surprising for a society ruled by a conservative authoritarian regime, which usually monopolizes all political functions, rendering such society generally apolitical.

The steps that the parties should have taken in this electoral campaign and what lessons might have been gained for the next parliamentary elections are enumerated in the conclusion of this article. The elections to local councils ranging from large cities to small village settlements, added up to a total of 24,012 council seats. Of the 26,567 candidates interested in running, 25, 805 were registered to run by the local electoral commissions. The following small numbers aptly describe the chances of the main political parties: United Civic Party fielded 130 candidates, Social Democratic Party (led by Statkevich) – 103, Belarusian Popular Front – 76. If we were to add such conditionally oppositional parties as the Communists led by Kaliakin with approximately 500 candidates and the Liberal Democrats , led by Haidukevich – with 329, the opposition candidates running under party labels totalled 1,138 or just 4.3% of all the candidates. These figures demonstrate not only the difficult circumstances under which the opposition parties had to operate, but they also illustrate the low level of organizational development of the parties, the difficulty in finding qualified candidates, and the absence of systemic voter education. Of course, the regime's total control of the mass media, and of the election machinery, in effect predetermined the results.

Opposition cannot afford not to take part in even the most undemocratic elections, because these campaigns are one of the few legal means of communication with the electorate

The opposition parties ran into many official barriers. To start with, the local election commissions routinely blocked or limited the registration of opposition candidates. As announced by Lidziya Yarmoshyna, the Chairperson of the Central Election Commission at a press conference on 5 February, in the whole country only 762 candidates or 2.87% of the total number were denied registration. Not a particularly disturbing circumstance, unless one realizes, that 42% of those who were denied registration, were opposition candidates. Thus the registration process cut the number of all opposition party candidates almost in half to a total of 619.

Another major barrier was the disqualification of the most active opposition candidates while they were already campaigning. Thirty five Communist candidates (those opposed to the regime) terminated their candidacy under official pressure. Reserve officer Siarhiej Chyslau, running for a seat on the Minsk City Council, was disqualified within a week of the election for being too critical of Lukashenka in his campaign literature. Disqualified, as well, were other candidates in Minsk who represented the democratic parties' leadership. Analogous incidents took place in other regions of the country. The unjustified refusals to register opposition candidates and the unwarranted disqualifications, coupled with the limited number of opposition candidates to start with, resulted in the local elections being virtually without alternative candidates. As during the Soviet times, the overwhelming majority of 93% of all districts listed only one candidate.

Finally, the falsifications during the voting itself were the last step in the regime's 'management' of the elections. As a result of the disqualifications and balloting fraud, the total number of opposition party candidates who were actually elected was less than 1% (the exact number is difficult to establish since many party candidates hid their party affiliation by running as independents).

Could the results have been different ? They undoubtedly could have been, since these elections were taking place during the time of greatest changes in civic consciousness since 1994. The year 2002 showed a steady decline in Lukashenka's popularity, falling by half during the year, resulting in a low 25-27% popularity rating by the end of the year. Nonetheless, the opposition parties were not able to benefit from this, and their low ratings remained unchanged.

In the aftermath of the elections, democratic analysts and politicians advanced a variety of conflicting conclusions regarding the reasons for the opposition's successive electoral defeat. Some say that it was a mistake to participate in 'such a circus', others are complimenting the opposition for finally becoming systematized and capable of having their candidates elected . The latter hope that in time, step-by-step, just by taking part in elections, the opposition will eventually overcome the existing regime.

We believe that both approaches are flawed. On the one hand the opposition cannot afford not to take part in even the most undemocratic elections, because these campaigns are one of the few legal means of communication with the electorate. By refusing to participate in elections in an admittedly authoritarian environment, the opposition will drive itself into a corner, and that can only re-enforce the existing barrier put up through the efforts of Lukashenka and his Moscow consultants between the democratic forces and the population. The second approach – of indiscriminate participation in elections – results in accommodation to the system that the opposition needs to do everything to break down. It is this system that blocks the path to real democratic market reforms, that tears Belarus away from the civilized community of European nations, and that pulls it into the morass of Russian despotism.

The main lessons that the opposition should have learned from the last election, we believe, are the following:

1. The elections have again shown that no one party acting alone and separately, can expect to succeed. Only

a unified, independence oriented democratic movement, or a stable coalition of democratic parties and organizations, stands a chance. In retrospect, such a coalition should have been formed immediately after the 1996 coup. Now, this task is a matter of survival for democracy. In Belarus there exist no objective impediments toward uniting the opposition, these appear to be clearly subjective and able to be easily overcome. The only prerequisite that remains is that the parties' leaders understand the inevitable desirability of consolidation and really wish to unite.

2. It is insufficient just to participate in undemocratic elections in order for the opposition to achieve its strategic goals. In preparing for the parliamentary elections, the opposition needs to complement its electoral campaign with a countrywide campaign of non-violent resistance. Undertakings involving massive participation need to be new in content, as well as in appearance. It would be best of all to start with calls for socio-economic changes, that could become planks in the platforms of democratic candidates in the parliamentary elections in 2004. The non-violent methods should give the opposition moral advantage over their political adversaries, evoke trust from the population, and attract new people to its ranks.

3. It is imperative to start the task of preparing for the parliamentary elections without delay. Alongside the initiatives for consolidation of the opposition at the top, data about the burning socio-economic issues in the cities should be collected and analyzed. On the basis of this work it will be possible to present to the local as well as to the central authorities comprehensive packets of demands, and to plan activities related to these demands, both in specific locations and countrywide. In the presentation of these demands it is important to involve the type of people who could be the future democratic candidates, making them known and popular at the grass roots long before the start of the electoral campaign. This way, the coalition building at the top can be complemented by the effort at the grass roots level throughout the country. These are the steps that will make the unified opposition movement or bloc stable and lasting.

Finally, as paradoxical as it may seem at first glance, the results of the last local elections are confirming the tendency in Belarus that has grown stronger during the last few years. There remain fewer and fewer supporters of Lukashenka's policies, and the number of open or hidden opponents of his course has steadily grown. The fact that opposition candidates were elected in small towns and villages, confirms Lukashenka's loss of support even in his previous strongholds. The officials were forced to resort to unprecedented violations of law and falsifications of vote count because they were afraid of defeat.

The consolidation of the opposition on a pro-independence platform, providing an attractive alternative to the bankrupt political course, and skilled combining of electoral campaigns with non-violent protest actions can drastically change the situation in Belarus.

Such a course of action can bring about an early shift in the balance of forces to the advantage of supporters of independence and democracy.

Uladzimir Rouda is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Belarusian State University, and is currently the Executive Director of the Informational and Analytical Center for NGOs.

Congressman Smith Introduces "Belarus Democracy Act, 2003"

Congressman Christopher H. Smith of New Jersey introduced Bill H.R. 854 "Belarus Democracy Act of 2003" in the House of Representatives on 13 February, 2003. The full text of the speech follows:

"Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing the Belarus Democracy Act of 2003, which is **intended to help promote democratic development, human rights and the rule of law in the Republic of Belarus, as well as encourage the consolidation and strengthening of Belarus' sovereignty and independence.** I am joined by Congressmen HOYER, HOEFFEL and Congresswoman SLAUGHTER, as original cosponsors.

When measured against other European countries, the state of human rights in Belarus is abysmal — it has the worst record of any European state.

Through an illegitimate 1996 referendum, Alexander Lukashenka usurped power, while suppressing the duly-elected legislature and the judiciary. His regime has repeatedly violated basic freedoms of speech, expression, assembly, association and religion.

The democratic opposition, nongovernmental organizations and independent media have all faced harassment. Just within the last few months, we have seen a number of events reflecting the negative trend line: the passage of a repressive law on religion which bans religious activity by groups not registered with the government and forbids most religious meetings on private property; the bulldozing of a newly-built church; the incarceration of leading independent journalists; and the continued harassment, as well as physical attacks on the political opposition, independent media and non-governmental organizations--in short, anyone who, through their promotion of democracy, would stand in the way of the Belarusian dictator. Moreover, we have seen no progress on the investigation of the disappearances of political opponents--perhaps not surprisingly, as credible evidence points at the involvement of the Lukashenka regime in their murders. Furthermore, growing evidence also indicates Belarus has been supplying military training and weapons to Iraq, in violation of UN sanctions.

Despite efforts by the U.S. Government, non-governmental organizations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other European organizations, the regime of Alexander Lukashenka continues its hold onto power with impunity and to the detriment of the Belarusian people.

One of the primary purposes of this bill is to demonstrate U.S. support for those struggling to promote democracy and respect for human rights in Belarus despite the formidable pressures they face from the anti-democratic regime.

The bill authorizes increases in assistance for democracy building activities such as support for non-governmental organizations, independent media including radio and tele-

vision broadcasting to Belarus, and international exchanges. The bill also encourages free and fair parliamentary elections, conducted in a manner consistent with international standards--in sharp contrast to recent parliamentary and presidential elections in Belarus which flaunted democratic standards. As a result of these elections, Belarus has the distinction of lacking legitimate presidential and parliamentary leadership, which contributes to that country's self-imposed isolation.

In addition, this bill would impose sanctions against the Lukashenka regime, and deny high-ranking officials of the regime entry into the United States. Strategic exports to the Belarusian Government would be prohibited, as well as U.S. Government financing, except for humanitarian goods and agricultural or medical products. The U.S. Executive Directors of the international financial institutions would be encouraged to vote against financial assistance to the Government of Belarus except for loans and assistance that serve humanitarian needs.

The bill would require reports from the President concerning the sale or delivery of weapons or weapons-related technologies from Belarus to rogue states.

Mr. Speaker, finally, it is my hope that this bill would help put an end to the pattern of clear, gross and uncorrected violations of OSCE commitments by the Lukashenka regime and will serve as a catalyst to facilitate Belarus' integration into democratic Europe in which democratic principles and human rights are respected and the rule of law is paramount.

The Belarusian people deserve our support as they work to overcome the legacy of the past and develop a genuinely independent, democratic country based on the rule of law and democratic institutions."

(**Editor's note**: At the time of this writing, the original cosponsors Representatives Hoyer, Steffel and Slaughter were joined as cosponsors by Representatives Pitts, Gallegly and Crowley)

Source: Congressional Record, February 13, 2003

March 10, 2003

LITHUANIA SEEKS "SPECIAL ROLE" IN EU-BELARUS RELATIONS

Lithuanian Ambassador to Belarus Jonas Paslauskas told Belapan on 10 March that his country could play a special role in the development of relations between the European Union and Belarus, the agency reported. Paslauskas said Lithuania hopes to become an active member of EU and will advocate closer relations with neighboring states, including Belarus. He said Lithuania and Belarus should consider joint cooperation projects in the European context. He added that such projects could relate to environmental protection, combating illegal migration, or the development of the border-protection infrastructure. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 12, 2003)

CHRONICLE

January 15, 2003

BELARUSIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS ADOPT ELECTION PLATFORM.

Alyaksandr Bukhvostau, Valyantsina Matusevich, and Mikalay Statkevich — the leaders of the Belarusian Party of Labor, the Belarusian Women's Party Hope, and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (National Assembly), respectively — on 15 January signed a joint political platform for their candidates running in the 2 March local elections, Belapan reported. The three parties, which formed a coalition called the Social Democratic Union for the elections, vow to revive the system of local self-government and turn local soviets (councils) into "influential organizations capable of independently defending genuine public interests." The platform also calls for building a nationwide association of democratic councilors at every level. The coalition also pledges to seek a ban on local budgetary funds being spent on national programs and to empower local soviets to monitor local budget expenditures and the use of public property. (RFE/RL Newsline, January 15, 2003)

January 15, 2003

BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT ADOPTS 'TRULY EUROPEAN' PLATFORM.

The Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), the oldest opposition organization in the country, has adopted a new platform described by BNF leader Vintsuk Vyachorka as "truly European," BelaPAN reported on 15 January. Vyachorka told journalists on 14 January that the new platform has "abandoned the remnants of eclecticism and socialism." According to Vyachorka, the new platform is more democratic than its previous versions. The platform stresses that Belarus must remain a sovereign and democratic state. The BNF sees Belarus as a parliamentary republic but does not seek to abolish the presidency, provided the president is elected by parliament and only carries out representative functions. The BNF declares a course toward building a market economy; developing small and medium-sized enterprises; changing the foreign economic and monetary policy; reforming the taxation, budget, and monetary systems; and introducing private ownership of land as part of a large-scale agricultural reform.(RFE/RL Newsline, January 15, 2003)

January 22, 2003

OPPOSITION GROUP CONDEMNS 'MORAL, PHYSICAL TERROR' IN BELARUS

An opposition committee organizing events to mark the 85th anniversary of the proclamation of the non-Bolshevik Belarusian Democratic Republic on 25 March 1918 has condemned in a statement "moral and physical terror built up in Belarusian society," Belapan reported on 22 January. The statement was prompted by the recent physical assault on opposition-minded geologist Radzim Haretski. Haretski, a member of the Belarusian and Russian academies of science, was severely beaten by unidentified assailants last week. He sustained a head injury and a broken nose and is currently undergoing treatment at a neurosurgical hospital. "This [was] not the first case of violent assaults. [Writer] Artur Volski, [philologist] Adam Maldzis, [stage director] Valery Mazynski, [filmmaker] Yury Khashchavatski, and dozens of other prominent art and public figures who defend Belarus's sovereignty,

the ideas of democracy, and human rights and liberties have been beaten and injured lately," the statement says. It adds that the character of such assaults suggests they are "well-organized and purposeful action by professionally trained units serving to intimidate and destroy the politically conscious part of the Belarusian intelligentsia" (RFE/RL Newsline, January 23, 2003)

February 7, 2003

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT URGED TO STOP SUPPORTING SADDAM HUSSEIN.

Alyaksandr Yarashuk, the leader of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, has called on President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to immediately cease backing Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Belapan reported on 7 March, quoting an open letter by Yarashuk. Yarashuk said the U.S. policy on Iraq remains "within the framework of the UN Security Council Resolution 1441," which, Yarashuk added, does not rule out using force against Iraq. "The Belarusian state-propaganda machinery has unleashed a campaign against not only the U.S. but also the entire global community, whose representatives in the United Nations demanded that Iraq fulfill specific tasks in destroying [its] weapons of mass destruction. As a result, by involving ourselves in a conflict 3,000 kilometers away from our home, we have opposed ourselves to the whole humankind," Yarashuk wrote. Yarashuk called on Lukashenka to coordinate his Iraq policy with the UN and the Russian Federation and to put an end to the "anti-American and pro-Saddam propaganda campaign." (RFE/RL Newsline, Febrnuary 7, 2003)

February 19, 2003

BELARUS PUTS FOUR PETROCHEMICAL GIANTS ON SELLING BLOCK IN MOSCOW

The Belarusian Embassy in Moscow on 19 February published the privatization terms for four major Belarusian petrochemical enterprises, Belapan reported. The government is offering a 43.27 percent stake in Palimir (Navapolatsk), 43.19 percent of shares in Naftan (Navapolatsk), 43.08 percent of Azot (Hrodna), and 43.66 percent of Khimvalakno (Hrodna). Auctions will be held in March or April, while the payments by successful bidders are expected over several phases in 2003-05. The starting prices are $311 million, $467 million, $293 million, and $71 million, respectively. (RFE/RL Newsline, Febrnuary20, 2003)

February 28, 2003

ARE SOME BELARUSIAN LEGISLATORS LOSING THEIR FEAR OF LUKASHENKA?

Members of the Respublika group in the Chamber of Representatives —Uladzimir Parfianovič, Valery Fralou, Henadz Dyleuski, Uladzimir Lukaševič, and Uladzimir Reznikau — organized a roundtable with the participation of opposition politicians and civic and cultural activists in the House of the Government in Minsk on 27 February, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported.

The whole event lasted for 1,5 hours. It involved such Belarusian political figures as chair of BPF "Adradžennie" Vincuk Viačorka, UCP leader Anatol Labiedzka, deputy head of the BSDP NH Uladzimir Nisciuk, head of the Belarusian language Society Aleh Trusau, BHC chair Tacciana Procka, Young Front's leader Paval Sieviaryniec, poet Hienadz Buraukin, chairman of the Union of Artists Uladzimir Basalyha and others. They unanimously confirmed the necessity to support independence of Belarus and implement social-economic reforms, sounding alarm over the accelerated Belarusian-Russian integration. At the end they called on all country's political and public organizations to do their best in fighting for independence and join celebration of the 85th anniversary of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR)

" Today, you saw that the parliament has ceased to be manipulated [by the government]. It is possible and necessary to work with us," said deputy Dyleuski in summing up the roundtable, which took place in the lobbies of the legislature since the administration of the building did not allow participants to enter the session hall. Although invited, government representatives did not attend the event.



Uladzimir Parfianovič
Leader of Respublika group

Deputies Gen. Fralou and Parfianovič said that they became members of the organizing committee of the People's March " For Better Life!", scheduled for March 12. When asked by Charter's press-center whether he fears retaliation for that, the general said this: " No, I don't fear anymore. I left my fears behind. I'm sick and tired of fear. Why should I be scared at all? Am I not living in my native land?"

According to the general he made up his mind to join the March due to the current circumstances. " Holding mass actions is the best method of affecting the regime. And we have to make use of it, for the situation is catastrophic. And there is absolutely no hope for tomorrow. What can be worse than the absence of hope ?" – said Fralou.

Sources: RFE/RL Newsline, and Charter'97 Press Center, both on February 28, 2003

February 20, 2003

OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY RECOGNIZES BELARUSIAN LEGISLATURE

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on 20 February seated the National Assembly of Belarus as a full member, Belarusian media reported. The decision was taken despite a negative assessment of Belarus's progress toward democracy by an OSCE delegation that visited Belarus earlier this month The decision to grant full membership to the Belarusian legislature, supported by just 20 delegations in the 55-member OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, was the result of a so-called procedural approach, in which procedural issues take precedence over political ones. A U.S. proposal to postpone consideration until the assembly's summer session was supported by 18 member states.

...PROVOKING MIXED REACTIONS FROM BELARUSIAN POLITICIANS

"This is a victory for common sense," Belapan quoted Chamber of Representatives Chairman Anatol Malafeyeu as saying on 20 February of the decision granting his house full membership in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. On the other hand, exiled Belarusian National Front Leader Zyanon Paznyak told RFE/RL's Belarusian Service, "The recognition by the OSCE of the illegitimate chamber of the Lukashenka regime is, to put it graphically, a stab with a rusted knife in the back of independent

Belarus." Paznyak added, "In short, Europe has sold Belarus to Russia." Social Democratic Party leader Mikola Statkevich welcomed the decision, saying it will provide the West with an additional tool to influence the Belarusian government. United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka said the Belarusian opposition should modify its tactics in relations with the OSCE in view of its recognition of the National Assembly, but he did not elaborate, according to Belapan. (RFE/RL Newsline, February 21, 2003)

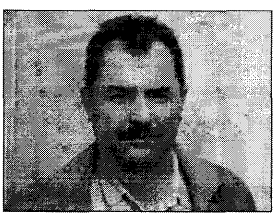
March 2, 2003
OFFICIAL REPORTS HEAVY TURNOUT FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS

Nearly 73 percent of voters took part in Belarus's local elections on 2 March, BelaPAN reported on 3 March, quoting preliminary results announced by Central Election Commission (TsVK) Secretary Mikalay Lazavik. "We did not expect that during the local elections Belarusian voters would be as active as during the presidential poll," TsVK Chairwoman Lidziya Yarmoshyna commented the previous day on the ballot, in which some 93 percent of local councilors ran unopposed. Official results are expected within several days. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 3, 2003)

March 2, 2003
AS OPPOSITION CRIES FOUL.

United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka said on 2 March that the local elections fell short of democratic standards, Belapan reported. "There was a brutal election campaign but no [fair] elections," Lyabedzka said. "The electoral legislation has not improved in terms of becoming more democratic and transparent," Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka said. "The election practice of setting up electoral commissions, filtering candidates, and [restricting] the possibility of monitoring does not leave any 'loopholes' for democracy," Vyachorka added. According to Youth Front leader Pavel Sevyarynets, the local elections were a "failure" for the opposition. "The elections were held under a scenario [written by] the regime. This can be said judging by both a great number of those who participated in early voting and the ballots with no alternative [candidates] in a majority of constituencies," Sevyarynets added. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 3, 2003)

March 4, 2003
BELARUSIAN JOURNALIST'S SENTENCE COMMUTED



Mikola Markievič

A district court in Asipovičy, Mahileu Voblasc, on 4 March commuted the sentence of journalist Mikola Markievič from time in a corrective-labor facility to corrective labor at home, BelaPAN reported. Markievič, who last year was sentenced to 1 1/2 years of labor for slandering President Alyaksandr Lukašenka, has been serving his term in Asipovičy since September. The new verdict means Markievič may return to his home city, Horadnia, where he will have to find a job and transfer 15 percent of his earnings to the state for 12 months. " I'm glad to be able to return home. The court's verdict once again highlighted the absurdity of my previous punishment," Markievič said. Markievič's colleague, Paval Mažejka, who was also sentenced for slandering the president, lost his appeal with the Supreme Court last month and remains jailed (RFE/RL Newsline, March 4, 2003

March 12, 2003
BELARUSIANS DEMONSTRATE 'FOR A BETTER LIFE.'

An estimated 6,000 people took part in what planners dubbed a "People's March for a Better Life" in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, on 12 March, according to the website of organizers Charter-97 (http://www.charter97.org). Demonstrators held banners reading "Stop plundering people," "Lukashenka, feed our kids," and "Reduce taxes and rent," among other things. Organizers of the rally demanded that the government raise salaries and pensions, reduce public-utilities fees, ensure opposition access to radio and television, stop repression, and hold off on conducting any referendum on extending the current presidential term of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 13, 2003)

March 12, 2003
STRIKE BY SMALL BUSINESSMEN: 30 Towns, 100,000 Strikers

Over 100 thousand small business representatives engaged in the entrepreneurs' strike on March 12. The strike was part of the national campaign People's March "For Better Life!". Today the Minsk marketplaces "Tractor", "Akvabel", "Chervensky", as well as trade centers "Zerkalo", "Palace of sports" and "Parking" halted their business operations. The country's largest commodity market "Dynamo" is totally empty. Few still sell at "Impulse", while "Kupalauski" and "Underground city" are totally closed. Sellers of foodstuffs at "Kamarouka" joined the strike, but as far as their stuff can get spoiled soon, many of them began trade. Most of "Zdanovicy" tradesmen also skip trading today, just like the retailers from Horadnia, Mahilou, Homiel, Viciebsk, Svietlahorsk, Rahacou, Mazyr, Barysau, Baranavicy, Zlobin, Pinsk, Salihorsk, Novapolacak, Vaukavysk, Biaroza, Pietrykau. (Charter'97 Press Center, March 12, 2003)

March 13, 2003
BELARUSIAN ORGANIZERS OF 'FOR A BETTER LIFE' PROTEST JAILED FOR 15 DAYS

Four organizers of the "People's March for a Better Life" protest that was staged in Minsk on 12 March were sentenced on 13 March to 15 days in jail, BelaPAN reported. The District Court



in Minsk found Dzmitry Bandarenka, Andrey Sannikau, and Lyudmila Hraznova, all coordinators for the human rights group Charter-97, and Leanid Malakhau, co-chairman of the Private Ownership association, guilty of organizing and participating in an unsanctioned demonstration under the Belarusian Administrative Offenses Code. "Someone appears to have been angered very much and worry very much, as I has been given the maximum term," said Hraznova. She said authorities are afraid of mass protests and a new force, small business owners, as they realize that such people are able to influence developments in the country. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 14, 2003)

March 16, 2003
BELARUSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA HOLDS CONGRESS.

An estimated 800 people from Belarus and abroad took part in an All-Belarusian Intelligentsia Congress held in Minsk on 16 March, the Charter-97 website (http://www.charter 97.org) reported. Participants discussed the political, economic, and cultural situations in Belarus. A resolution adopted by the congress defined the situation as "a profound systemic crisis." "The authorities' strategic policy of state-controlled economy and suppression of democratic freedoms has driven the country to international isolation and its economy to the brink of collapse," the congress delegates asserted. They also expressed opposition to any attempts to eliminate Belarusian sovereignty and protested the idea of a referendum on extending President Lukashenka's term in office. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 17, 2003)

March 18, 2003
PROMINENT BELARUSIANS DEMAND RELEASE OF JAILED PROTESTERS

Over 70 Belarusian public figures and international human rights groups issued a statement on 18 March demanding the immediate release of four organizers of the recent "People's March for a Better Life" demonstration, BelaPAN and RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. "The severe sentences prove that the current authorities will give the Belarusian citizens neither freedom nor democracy, nor normal and decent lives," said the statement, noting that the demonstrators put forward mainly economic demands. "It is evident that the authorities fear mass, well-organized, nonviolent protests. Driven by fear, they went so far as to impose a 15-day jail sentence on Lyudmila Hraznova, who has an underage daughter," the signatories added. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 19, 2003)

March 18, 2003
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER GOES INTO HIDING TO AVOID JAIL.


Prof. Jury Chadyka

Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) Deputy Chairman Jury Chadyka has chosen to go into hiding to avoid spending 15 days in jail, BelaPAN reported on 19 March. Khadyka was arrested on 17 March in connection with last week's unauthorized protest in Minsk, but his trial was postponed due to procedural errors pertaining to one of the charges. Hiding for two months "is better than 15 days in a jail cell, where people have to sleep in overcoats on bare boards, where there is a constant stench from the lavatory, where the trellised tiny window near the ceiling makes it possible to see only a piece of the sky," Khadyka wrote in an open e-mail. Under Belarusian law, a minor civil offense is only punishable within two months after it was committed. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 19, 2003)

March 21, 2003
BELARUSIAN JOURNALIST RELEASED ON PAROLE.

A district court in Zlobin, Homel Oblast, decided on 21 March to release Paval Mažejka on parole, BelaPAN reported. The same day, Mažejka left the "open-type corrective" facility where he had been held and took a train to Hrodna. The court's decision does not annul Mažejka's sentence. He has to register with the criminal administration inspectorate in Hrodna and may be returned to a corrective facility by court decision for two or more minor civil offenses committed within the five months and eight days remaining until the end of his term. Under law, prisoners may be released on parole after serving half of their term. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 24, 2003)

March 21, 2003
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT REPLACES FOREIGN MINISTER, VOWS TO BOOST "WESTERN VECTOR."


Michail Chvastou

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 21 March appointed Syarhey Martynau as Belarus' foreign minister, BelaPAN reported. Prior to the appointment, Martynau served as Belarus' ambassador to Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, and as resident representative to the EU and NATO. Martynau's predecessor, Michail Chvastou, was appointed ambassador to the United States and Mexico. The decision is aimed at strengthening the "western vector" of Belarusian foreign policy, Lukashenka said on 21 March. "We cannot build relations with the U.S. on a confrontation basis," he added. Lukashenka noted that the decision to appoint Chvastou, whom he called "one of the best Belarusian diplomats," as ambassador to the United States is evidence of Belarus' readiness to step up cooperation with this country and will be conducive to the expansion of bilateral relations. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 24, 2003)

March 23, 2003
BELARUSIAN POLICE DISPERSE OPPOSITION RALLY, 10 JAILED.

Police forces dispersed several hundred opposition activists who gathered in downtown Minsk on 23 March for an unauthorized demonstration to mark the 85th anniversary of the proclamation of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, Belapan reported. Police arrested 40 protesters, of whom 10 were sentenced on 24 March to jail terms of three to 15 days, and 13 others were fined or given warnings. "The trials were just a formality and [they were] accompanied by gross violations of law," said Vyacheslau Siuchyk, who was sentenced to 15 days. Jail sentences were also handed down to Dzmitry Filipovich (15 days), Valyantsin Baranau

(10), Pavel Sevyarynets (10), Aleh Myadzvedzeu (10), Pavel Znavets (10), Yury Fabisheuski (10), Uladzimir Yukha (seven), Valyantsin Malashka (five), and Dzyanis Dashkevich (three). (RFE/RL Newsline, March 25, 2003)



March 25 in Miensk

March 25, 2003

BELARUSIAN POLICE THWART ANOTHER OPPOSITION RALLY

Police forces dispersed a rally organized by the Belarusian opposition in downtown Miensk on 25 March to mark the 85th anniversary of the proclamation of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, Belapan reported. Police reportedly arrested 15 people during the action, including Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka.

The Belarusian opposition celebrates anniversaries of the proclamation of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, a short-lived non-Bolshevik state declared on 25 March 1918, as a landmark event on Belarusians' path toward a democratic state, independent from Moscow. Such celebrations have been repeatedly resisted by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime. (RFE/RL Newsline, March 26, 2003)

Belarus' Forum

Congress of Belarusian Intelligentsia

Over six hundred members of Belarusian elite met in Miensk on March 16. These were writers, educators, lawyers, physicians, artists, politicians, engineers and scientists from the regions as well as from the capital. Their slogan was **"Independent Belarus —a Free and Wealthy Society".** Among those present at the Congress were such well known personalities as the former Speakers of the Supreme Soviet, Shushkevich and Hryb, former Ministers Krauchanka and Lyavonau, writers Hilevich and Arlou. With the exception of a few members of the Respublika group of the National Assembly, absent were the representatives of the ruling bodies, even though they were invited. The Co-chairmen of the event were Uladzimir Kolas, the founder of the prestigious Humanitarian Lyceum in Miensk, well-known painter Alyaksei Marachkin, and the historian and editor Alyaksei Karol.

Special greetings to the Congress from outside of the country came from Ivonka Survilla, the President of the exile BNR Rada, from exiled political leader Zyanon Paznyak, and from writer Vasil Bykau, now residing in Prague. In his moving message, Bykau singled out "Who is to blame?" and "What's to be done?" as the accursed key questions facing the Congress. "The answer to the blame question is presumably known, which leaves the second question to be answered. Then, what must we do, asked Bykau rhetorically: Change the tactics of the struggle? But tactics have their limits and they appear to have been exhausted. Change the (country's) leadership? But might not the new be worse than the old? Revise our old national idea? But in what manner? Perhaps, we (meaning the national elite) should change, but how and in which direction? Perhaps, to try to change the mentality of the electorate, but is that in our power? If that mentality has not been changed by centuries of enslavement , can it be changed by ten years of tyranny?

... Constant questions and problems. According to Hegel, the greatest problem is not the conflict between right and wrong, but the conflict between two rights. Our society already understands that it is not capable of solving these accursed problems, that they remain to be solved by its elite. Right wing and left, (patriotically) nationalistic and (universally) democratic, radical and liberal. **Thus, the prime precondition – unity".**

Bykau concluded his message: "But worst of all, with fruitless passage of time, our problems are at a standstill. So, what should we do? Let us confer (among ourselves)"



March 16, 2003
Congress of Belarusian Intelligentsia

And confer they did. Some briefly and to the point, others at great length. Some with new concrete ideas, others recounting the slights and injustices of the past. Economist Henadz Lych found sufficient reasons to blame the elite for "failing to become the moral authority, for failing to consolidate the nation, for failing to influence the government's decisions". In his view, "the intelligentsia and the political parties must meet each other halfway, they must overcome disunity".

The leader of the Popular Front, philologist Vintsuk Vyachorka addressed the Congress at length with a somewhat different view. Few key summarized excerpts follow:

" Today, our state is governed not by a statesmanlike political elite, rather by a clique. Whereas elite strives to grow upward, a clique spirals downward, because its maximum permissible level is the low level of its leader." He listed the responsible elite's main goals:

First, our intelligentsia must define its mission. Just as the Polish teacher, the Lithuanian priest and the Czech physician influenced their students, their flock and their patients, so can we. An educated and responsible elite has the potential and the right to be in the forefront of the populace.

Second, let's stop talking about a confrontation between the intellectuals and the political parties. Rather, let us involve the intellectuals in the activity of the parties. In the Popular Front, whose intellectual majority takes a responsible stand regarding unified coalition, we are **against any artificial unity.** How is it possible to imagine an honest unity between those who stand for independent Belarus within a united Europe, and those who try to convince us that Belarus can enter Europe via Russia ?

Third, the intellectuals must serve as example in performing their daily professional tasks well, while feeling free in expressing their personal convictions.

Fourth, each educated professional has a mighty weapon at his disposal: he can either refuse to follow or quietly sabotage criminal or incompetent orders. Such non-violent civil disobedience has been practiced successfully elsewhere."

The final resolution adopted at the Congress supported the formation of a committee that will select the members of a permanent Council representing the intelligentsia. The Council members will operate in a variety of interest sections, travel throughout the country, and talk to the local elites. They will work on specific proposals, forwarding them to the authorities, as well as informing the population about them. The Congress co-chairman Uladzimir Kolas concluded: "This way, we expect to develop a growing number of supporters. **Then our voice will become stronger, so it can be heard by all**".

Compiled from Belarusian programs of RFE/RL.

Belarusians Abroad

FREEDOM DAY observances in Prague

On March 22, 2003 Belarusians living in the Czech Republic gathered in Prague to celebrate the Freedom Day — the 85th anniversary of the proclamation of independence by the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR).

The observance was held in the Mirror Chapel of the National Library, situated in the Klementinum — a beautiful ancient architectural complex in the city of Prague. It is interesting to note, that in 1923 the founders of the BNR who then found refuge in Prague, observed the 5th anniversary of Independence Proclamation in the very same Mirror Chapel.

The gathering was addressed by the visiting President of BNR Rada (Council). Ivonka Survilla, who appealed to Belarusians world wide to unite in defense of Belarus' independence. She was followed by invited guests from Belarus: the writer Valancin Taras, the recently elected deputy of the Puchavičy district council — Aleś Michalevič, and the well-known singer Andrej Mielnikau.

The Belarusian community was then greeted by Mr. Luboš Veselý, representing the Czech TV Foundation "People in Need", who expressed a wish and hope that the next, or at least the 90th anniversary of Freedom Day will be celebrated in a free Belarus.

Finally, the meeting heard a brief address by Vasil Bykau (excerpts follow), who currently resides in Prague and has been chosen to head the All-Belarusian Committee for honoring the 85th anniversary of Freedom Day.

In the cultural part of the celebration that followed, the gathering heard patriotic songs, performed by the visitor from Belarus — popular singer Andrej Mielnikau, and by Prague's own Siaržuk Sokalau-Vojuš.

Following the established tradition, attendees then visited the Olsany Cemetery to honor the memory of famous Belarusians buried there: BNR presidents Piotra Krečeuski and Vasil Zacharka, and the singer Michaś Zabejda-Sumicki

On March 25 representatives of Belarusian organizations of Czech Republic, students, Belarusian citizens and their Ukrainian colleagues assembled in front of the Belarusian embassy in Prague, protesting against the dictatorial policy of Alexander Lukashenka, the so-called "unification of Belarus and Russia" and demanded a stop to persecution of Belarusians for political reasons, reports the press-service of the Union of Belarusians Abroad.

The picketers read out the joint appeal of the Union and "Skaryna" cultural association to the Belarusian society, calling on all Belarusians to acknowledge their responsibility for the fate of their nation and do their best defending Belarus' independence. Representatives of the Belarusian embassy didn' t respond to the protesters' request to accept a message. Venetian blinds were rolled down in the embassy's windows — in broad daylight.

Excerpts from Vasil Bykau's address

" 85 years ago, on a gray spring day, Belarusians have realized a miracle. No, they did not defeat their enemies, did not liberate their country , did not win freedom — but they managed to light a fragile candle of HOPE. Its modest light helped our people for years to fight the Bolshevik oppression and the Fascist occupation, as well as the feeling of desperation, deeply rooted after centuries of suffering. We are glad that this candle has continued burning. Its bright flame may have been weak at times, but it still gives generations of Belarusians hope for light and warmth, hope for a better future for their families.

The best of our countrymen have been preserving and nurturing this light of hope — with one thought in mind: at a favorable time it will burst into a bright sunlight. However, without this fragile light of hope we may be engulfed by the eternal night.

God Help us ! Long live Belarus !

Introduction to Studies of Belarusistics

This course, presented by the Philosophy Faculty of the Charles University in Prague, continued in the spring of 2003 with the following lectures:

— February 27, 2003
Ihar Lalkou - History of Belarusian presence in France

— March 6, 2003
Ina Paulovič - Liberal tenencies in the Belarusian society in the early 20th century

— March 13, 2003
Aleś Smalančuk - The Polish question in Belarusian history

— March 20, 2003
Alaksiej Sałanda - Heraldics in the works of Francisak Skaryna; heraldic analysis of the Ruthenian Bible engravings

— March 27, 2003
Aleś Kraucevič - Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Litva) in the context of Belarusian and European history

• Belarusian Diaspora on the Iberian Peninsula

Belarusians, living in Spain and Portugal established a new organization — **Asociation Bieloruso-Iberica**.

The founders wish to establish contact with other diaspora groups in Europe, and would appreciate hearing from them, as well as receiving Belarusian press and publications.

Their E-mail address is: **zhurtavannie@yahoo.es**

Source: Newspaper *Bielarus*, New York, February 2003

Immigration from Belarus

Immigration from Belarus to North America consisted of three main waves. The first was at the turn of the 20th century up to and including the period immediately after World War I, the next – after World War II, and the last, that is still continuing – during the last twenty years.

The First Wave of Immigration.

The first immigrants from Belarus reached the New World as early as the 17th century. They were, however, mainly individuals rather than groups of immigrants. Larger numbers started arriving in the second half of the 19th century, peaking at the beginning of the 20th. The territory that is currently the Republic of Belarus was fully absorbed by the Russian Empire in 1795 and remained a part of that empire until World War I. These immigrants were generally listed as Russian or coming from Russia. According to their religious affiliation, they were mainly either Eastern Orthodox (also called Russian Orthodox), Catholic and Jewish. They clustered in the East and the Midwest of the United States and Canada. They organized themselves around churches and synagogues, also forming social and trade organizations. The Jewish immigrants from Belarus and Lithuania were known as Litvacks with others identifying themselves regionally as being from Vilna, Grodno and the Minsk regions. Many of these religious institutions have survived to this day. The social organizations, having well served the new arrivals, eventually ceased functioning, as later generations were assimilated into American society. A prime example of the institutions that have not only survived, but have steadily grown, is YIVO – the Yiddish Institute of Vilna in New York City.. Well known Americans and Canadians whose roots stem from present day Belarus are Kirk Douglas, Robert Sarnoff, Jessica Savich, Arthur Levitt, Wayne Gretzky, Olga Korbut, and many others.

Many fourth and fifth generation immigrants are developing an interest in researching their roots, thus focusing renewed attention on the first wave of immigrants. Realizing that their forebears came from the territory of the newly independent Belarus, they are turning to currently active Belarusan organizations in North America for information.

Various estimates have been made of the size of this first wave of immigrants from the territory of Belarus. They are generally estimated to be in excess of one million. By background they were predominantly peasants, small tradesmen and artisans, in search of a better and freer life.

The Post World War II Wave.

Unlike the previous immigrants, who were escaping religious oppression and economic hardship, this wave consisted of the survivors of Nazi concentration camps and refugees who had been living in the Displaced Persons camps of Germany and Austria. They were generally of a higher educational level and were more politically aware as compared to their predecessors. They either joined the

existing institutions and organizations or began establishing new houses of worship, part-time educational programs, press, cultural and civic organizations. Like the first wave, they at first settled mainly in the East and Midwest, later spreading to the warmer climes of Florida and California. The size of this second immigration wave is estimated to be over 100,000.

Many of the organizations, whose main aims were to provide a helpful social environment for acclimatization in a new country while retaining homeland traditions, are now marking their 50th anniversaries. Their activity is concentrated in the following states and provinces: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C. area, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Florida, California, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba. The major diaspora events are the annual celebrations of the anniversaries of Declaration of Belarusan Independence in 1918, the Biennial Conventions of Belarusans of North America, and various cultural and political conferences.

The Current Post-Soviet Union Wave.

This wave of immigration had its start in the waning days of the Soviet Union with Jewish immigrants who were enabled to leave Belarus (BSSR) as a result of the Jackson-Vanick law. Following the dissolution of USSR this wave was extended by diverse immigrants from the newly independent Republic of Belarus. These immigrants were: individuals granted political asylum as a result of worsening human rights conditions under President Lukashenka, people joining their families, people with work and student visas, and a steady inflow of people winning their green cards through the annual immigration lotteries. The estimated number of people who have immigrated from Belarus either permanently or temporarily in the last twenty years is in the thousands. Their educational backgrounds are generally better than those of their predecessors. Almost all of them have a middle education, with 30-40% university graduates. Many are professionals with technical and scientific backgrounds, many are teachers, artists and writers. There are also people with skills in a variety of building trades and commerce.

What Are Their Needs? What Are Their Contributions?

First, they need assistance in adapting to the North American society. They need assistance finding employment, housing, learning the English language, and finding medical care. They also require assistance acclimating to the details of life in a new country - making social connections with their compatriots while at the same time building ties to their new and ethnically diverse American neighbors.

A number of immigrants are able to engage in and contribute to their communities almost immediately in the areas of computer programming, construction and other occupations for which they are already qualified. Others start out as limo drivers, caring for the elderly and in other home care employment. The existing cultural and social programs may still be expanded and improved with outside financial support, new programs may be established to fill additional and developing needs. A short list of initiatives might include the training and/or re-training new arrivals for employment and familiarizing them with their new environment, regulations and laws. Some of the immigrants have an urgent need to attend basic English language courses, while others need assistance in obtaining certification as official translators. The Belarusan American Association, among others, has a number of qualified individuals who may organize and conduct such programs..

The following on-going projects require outside financing in order to continue functioning or to bring them to a successful completion:

English-Belarusan Dictionary – This is a major effort sponsored by the Belarusan Institute of Arts and Sciences to which it has devoted many years using the talents of many specialists in the field. It is undergoing final review and will be ready for printing in a few months.

Self-improvement seminars "I Can Live Better!" This is a project of seminars which has been ongoing in Belarus for the last two years. It teaches people the practical steps of self-improvement in various aspects of life: physical, spiritual, social and financial. The need for developing personal independence is obvious and well recognized in post-Soviet Belarus. The seminars are conducted on a self financing basis, but barely so, considering the disastrous economic conditions in Belarus. Additional funding is needed in order to develop supplementary materials and to support NGO's in Belarus in conducting the seminar project. At the present time this project has the support of the Lew Sapieha Foundation and individual donors.

BELARUSIAN REVIEW. This English language quarterly publication is produced in the U.S. and Europe and is distributed world wide, including Belarus. Its readers and subscribers are scholars, politicians, government figures, students and members of various institutions that are interested in Belarusan affairs. It is the only English language publication that deals solely with Belarusan political, economic and cultural topics, including current news items. In order to strengthen the publication's goal of promoting democracy and free enterprise in Belarus, the publication must accomplish the following tasks: 1) expand its distribution to Western universities and educational institutions; 2) attract a greater circle of collaborators, contributing writers and editors; and 3) obtain the means to publish more frequently.

Support for Belarusan-language schooling in Belarus. The Orsa Romano Cultural and Educational Foundation recognized the discriminatory practices in Belarus with regard to Belarusan-language schooling. Under the current totalitarian rule of President Lukashenka who has dreams of playing a role on the greater Russian political stage, Belarusan-language schooling is being reduced to primitive levels. To help prevent this from happening, the ORCE Foundation has supplied a number of schools with computers and other equipment. It is in need of additional used or new equipment that could be delivered to specially chosen deserving schools in Belarus.

Meeting Facilities. With possibly one exception, the various Belarusan communities in North America resort to using church related facilities or outside facilities which require hard-to-manage rental payments. Securing facilities for strictly civic, cultural and educational uses or at the least, securing assistance for their permanent rental is a major need in a number of communities.

Walter Stankievich

Rutgers University Libraries Establish New Collecting Focus on Belarusian Culture and Communities

Belarus today is an independent country. It has five neighbors: Poland to the west, Lithuania to the northwest, Latvia to the north, Russia to the north and east, and Ukraine to the south. The Belarusians are a Slavic people with an old culture. Belarus is inhabited also by a number of national minorities: Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Tatars, Jews, and others. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Belarus live in the United States. One of their greatest concentrations is in the state of New Jersey. It is therefore fitting that we set out to document the life and cultural achievements of this people in its original and adopted environment.

The Libraries recently laid the cornerstone for the collection with two important acquisitions. The family of the late, published poet and community activist of Milltown, NJ, *Janka Zolak* (pseudonymn of Anton Danilovich), has generously donated his papers and books documenting nearly fifty years of literary and political activity, most of it in New Jersey. We are also indebted to *Dr. Jan Zaprudnik* of Somerset, NJ, the author of two books in the Rutgers University Libraries: *Belarus : At a Crossroads in History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993) and *Historical Dictionary of Belarus* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1998), for the donation of his fine collection of books on Belarus, his papers documenting more than thirty years in charge of Radio Liberty's Belarusian Section in New York, and a monetary contribution toward the acquisition and processing of books and manuscripts dealing with Belarus.

On April 30, 2002 nine leaders of the Belarusian community met with Libraries staff in the Alexander Library to view the Zolak Papers and discuss the collection of books and records relating to the Belarusians. The collection will have a dual role: to preserve the memory of Belarusians' life experiences, and to acquire and make available books and periodicals that will support Rutgers' academic programs. Rutgers' library collections are open to the public and its books are available through Interlibrary Loan. We are especially interested in the diaries, letters, and organizational records of New Jersey Belarusians and their community organizations such as churches, cultural, and mutual benefit associations.

Rutgers welcomes volunteer and financial assistance toward the processing of these papers, many of which are in Belarusian Cyrillic characters. The university also teaches courses in East European culture, history, cinema, and politics, some of which also relate to the study of Belarus. In support of these academic programs the Rutgers University Libraries are seeking to establish an endowed fund that will provide annual income toward the purchase of books in East Slavic culture and history. *Rutgers University alumni* and others who wish to support these efforts may make contributions to the Rutgers University Foundation, Winants Hall, 7 College Ave., New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1261. Please be sure to indicate in a note or on your check that your donation is for the support of the Rutgers Libraries and their Belarusian collections.

If you would like to contribute toward these efforts, please contact Ron Becker, Head of Special Collections, e-mail: rbecker@rci.rutgers.edu, telephone 732/932-7006 about manuscript collections, Jim Niessen, World History Librarian, e-mail: niessen@rci.rutgers.edu, telephone 732/932-7129x136, about books, or either one about mixed collections. Both are in the Alexander Library, 169 College Avenue in New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1163. Inquiries are also welcome to Dr. Vitaut Kipel, President of the Belarusan Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1797 Buttonwood Avenue,Toms River, NJ 08755, Tel.: (732) 557-0094.

CORRECTION

The article "Our Swedish Connection .", printed in the Winter issue of Belarusian Review (Vol. 14, No. 4), contains some erroneous information. Refer to the 2nd and 3rd sentences in the righthand column of page 20. These sentences **should read** as follows:

...For instance, the *Carolina Rediviva* library at the University of Uppsala contains a book collection that consists of about 120 ancient prints in Belarusian and countless others in Polish, Latin, German and Hebrew — all originating in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

January 19-21, 2003
Heidelberg, Germany

Young people from Belarus, **who are studying or working in Western Europe** met in this ancient university town to get acquainted and to found an informal organization — **Association of Belarusian Youth Abroad**, whose aim is to provide mutual assistance and study/career information. Representatives from Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Netherlands and Finland took part in the meeting.

The organization plans to create an informational Website and stage similar meetings in the near future, beginning with July 2003.

For more information, write to:
krynica@yahoo.com
Source: Web-site www. zbsb.org (*Backaŭščyna*)

Thoughts and Observations

OSCE Restores Its Mission, But Will It Be Effective?

By Valentinas Mite

The head of the new Belarus mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe today spoke in Minsk about the new objectives of the group, which was recently allowed to return to Belarus following the mission's expulsion last year. But, as RFE/RL reports, analysts say the mission's new mandate may actually make its work less effective. (RFE/RL, Prague, 17 February 2003)

The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has restored its mission in Belarus. The return comes several months after President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, angered by the mission's criticism of his record on human rights and democracy building, choked the mission into closure by refusing to renew visas for the mission's officials. The last mission employee left Belarus last October.

Now, the OSCE is back with a new mandate, one that observers say may limit the mission's ability to properly monitor the human rights situation. German diplomat Eberhard Heyken heads the new Belarus mission. At a press conference today in Minsk, he gave an upbeat assessment of what he called the mission's "new start." He expressed hope the new mandate would help establish an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. "Decisive notions in the new mandate are the institution building, the rule of law, civil society, economy, environment. And these notions reflect the essence of the OSCE," Heyken said.

Constraints will force mission officers to be cautious to the point of ineffectiveness

But some say the agreement behind the new mandate favors Minsk and is so broad and unfocused that it is virtually unworkable. Valery Karbalevich is an analyst with the Strategic Center, a nongovernmental think tank in Minsk. He told RFE/RL the new OSCE mandate is a clear-cut victory for Lukashenka. "The OSCE accepted almost all the conditions that were put forward by Minsk. Minsk asked for the mandate to be changed at the very beginning of 2002, but the OSCE refused to change the mandate. Minsk then used pressure and [finally] expelled the mission from Belarus. Only after the mission was expelled did the OSCE agree to discuss the question of the mandate. The negotiations resulted in [the OSCE's] acceptance of all of Minsk's demands," Karbalevich said.

Those demands, Karbalevich said, have resulted in a vague mandate that has expanded to include not only human rights and democracy monitoring but also economic and ecological problems. The analyst added that this broader mandate, rather than granting the OSCE greater influence, will drain it of much of its past power. Karbalevich said the new mandate has several other drawbacks that may make the mission's work in Belarus irrelevant.

"The difference is that the new mission has time constraints: Its mandate is agreed only for one year. After a year, Minsk will decide whether to prolong the work of the group. If they agree [to prolong it], then they may decide who the staff will be as well. If Minsk decides it's unhappy with people working in the mission, the Belarusian authorities may demand that they stop their activities [in Belarus]," Karbalevich said. These constraints will force mission officers to be cautious to the point of ineffectiveness. It is a predicament, he said, for which the OSCE itself is to blame. The body did nothing to defend its former mission when it was pushed out of the country. "[The officials in the new mission will remember] that the former mission was not defended by the OSCE when they were sent out of the country. In fact, they should see clearly that if Belarusian authorities disapprove of some of their actions, the OSCE [as an organization] will not defend them. The OSCE has shown it is powerless. And if an organization is not able to defend its own officials, how can it defend human rights, the civil rights of the people in the country where it functions?" Karbalevich said.

The effectiveness of the OSCE is largely dependent on the cooperation of the government in the countries where it maintains its missions. The Russian government recently refused to extend the mandate of OSCE's mission in the breakaway republic of Chechnya. Alyaksandr Klaskouski, who edits *Novosti*, a Belarusian Internet publication, agrees that the new mission will have to work under more difficult conditions. He said the new mandate gives the Belarusian authorities more ways to isolate the mission or to say it has transgressed its mandate.

But Klaskouski added that the fate of democracy in Belarus does not depend on the work of the OSCE. "In principle, there is no need to lend too much importance to the activities of the OSCE in the political developments that are taking place and will continue to take place in Belarus. I think the Belarusian opposition has a tendency to lend increased importance to this mission, just as they, on the whole, rely too much on Western assistance and help from abroad. These tendencies come from a complex of weakness that the Belarusian opposition suffers from," Klaskouski said.

Klaskouski said most people in his country understand that there is little the OSCE and other pan-European groups can do to bring about change in Belarus. "People who are critical thinkers, as well as people who do not support the [Lukashenka] regime, have the impression that those European organizations stamp resolutions and that it's merely a bureaucratic system that's at work, that someone needs to say [in a report] that some work was done. [In Belarus's case, it was to say] there was a reaction to the worsening situation in Belarus," Klaskouski said.

In the end, Klaskouski said, Europe has problems of its own — and Belarus is only at the periphery of its interests.

Source: Weekly Magazine - Belarus, February 2003

Authorities Seeking To Limit Access To Russian, Western Media

The Belarusian public finds itself in a growing information void. There is virtually no access to Western media in the country. Russian television channels are being taken off the air, and local outfits loyal to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka are replacing radio stations broadcasting from Moscow. Official state media are highly subsidized, making life hard for the few independent Belarusian newspapers that still exist.

Belarusian authorities are taking steps to cut public access to information coming from the Russian mass media, which are often critical of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Belarusian analysts and journalists say these steps are being taken under the guise of developing Belarusian media but are only a sophisticated form of state censorship.

Vladimir Dorokhov is deputy director of the independent Institute for Socioeconomic and Political Studies based in Minsk. He told RFE/RL that television is the most influential medium in the country and that Russian channels are very popular.

Lukashenka is concerned that news reports coming from Moscow are undermining his rule

A survey conducted by the institute last month indicates that 78 percent of Belarusians get news about Belarus from watching Russian television. Dorokhov said Lukashenka is concerned that news reports coming from Moscow are undermining his rule. "Lukashenka has understood the danger that is posed by this undivided information space [between Russia and Belarus] and the dependence of the Belarusian viewers on the information streams that are coming from Russia. He cannot check this information as he controls information inside the country, when everything is under complete state control," Dorokhov said.

Dorokhov said the authorities took steps last summer to isolate Belarusians from what they consider the "negative influence" of Russian television and radio. It appears to be working. A recent survey conducted by the institute found that 44 percent of respondents said they trust state media, while 37 percent said they trust private outlets.

The Russian television channel ORT had been the most popular channel in Belarus. Six months ago, ORT suddenly disappeared from the air and was replaced by ONT, a hybrid Belarusian channel that broadcasts ORT's entertainment programs, films, and sport events but is supplemented with news produced in Minsk. The majority of ONT shares are owned by the Belarusian state.

The survey says that ONT is the most popular channel in the country, watched by 80 percent of respondents.

Original ORT programs can be watched only via satellite, a luxury many Belarusians cannot afford. Dorokhov said that similar fates soon await two other

Russian channels seen in Belarus: *RTR* and *Kultura*

Irina Khalip is deputy editor in chief of the independent Russian-language Belarusian newspaper *Beloruskaya delovaya gazeta*, which is known for its objective reporting and investigative style and has about 12 percent of the market. Khalip told RFE/RL that the moves mean censorship: "It means that some airtime [of original ORT programming] is covered by the Belarusian-produced programs. Some investigative programs [coming from Moscow] are pushed from prime time to very late at night. Let's say, a Sunday program hosted by Vladimir Pozner, *Vremena*, which was very popular in Belarus, was pushed to one o'clock in the morning on Sundays. Of course, only a few people can afford to wait for it, maybe only those who do not need to be at work at nine o'clock in the morning."

Khalip said the Belarusian news inserts are of low quality and do not deal frankly with most political events. There are also many Belarusian ads in the programs. However, ONT is more attractive than official Belarusian television, which is often described as being dull.

She said the authorities have a history of taking action against some Moscow-made programs. In 2001, ORT was simply taken off the air when it showed a film by Pavel Sheremet, *Dikaya okhota* (Wild Hunting), that investigated the disappearances of Belarusian politicians. It was later explained that some unspecified technical problems had prevented the broadcast.

Dorokhov said Belarusian stations are also replacing Moscow radio stations. "Beginning with this year, rebroadcasting of three Russian radio stations was stopped. *Mayak, Yunost*, and *Golos Rossii* broadcast on FM frequencies. Instead, Belarusian radio stations have been put on the air on the same frequencies," Dorokhov said.

Dorokhov said the new radio companies are controlled by the Belarusian state and that Lukashenka recently stated that he will "never permit the privatization of ideology."

Russian newspapers are not as popular as Russian television in Belarus. The survey conducted by the Institute for Socioeconomic and Political Studies indicates the most popular newspaper in the country is *Komsomolskaya pravda*, which is printed in Moscow. It is read by 38 percent of the respondents. The daily mainly concentrates on soft news and human-interest stories.

The most popular Belarusian daily is *Sovetskaya Belorussia*, which is read by 37 percent of respondents.

Why is *Sovetskaya Belorussia*, a dull Soviet-style daily, so popular? Dorokhov said it is the same reason why the communist daily *Pravda* was popular in the Soviet Union. "The reason is very simple: One of the founders of this newspaper is the presidential administration of Belarus. This fact alone makes many people subscribe to this newspaper. And it is especially true of state officials of various ranks. Others subscribe for the same reason people subscribed dur-

ing the Soviet period to the official newspaper *Pravda*. They want to know the general line. They want to know what authorities think about various topics. It is an official face of the country expressed through the mass media," Dorokhov said.

Khalip agreed that *Sovetskaya Belorussia* is a relic of the Soviet era but said it is difficult for independent newspapers to compete with it because it is subsidized by the state. "*Sovetskaya Belorussia* is supported by the state, and it can allow itself to be the cheapest daily. We [*Beloruskaya delovaya gazeta*] have been forced to increase our price because otherwise we would not be able to cover expenses," Halip said.

She said that *Sovetskaya Belorussia* costs 150 Belarusian rubles (about $0.08), compared with 300 Belarusian rubles for *Beloruskaya delovaya gazeta* and that *Sovetskaya Belorussia* is printed in color.

Dorokhov said there are no Western newspapers or magazines on sale in kiosks in Belarus. The Western press is sold only in a few places at high prices.

The Internet is also not a solution for those hunting for objective information. Dorokhov said the Internet is regularly used by only about 3 percent of Belarusians. There is only one Internet provider in the country, Beltelecom, a state-owned company.

Source: RFE/RL, 24.01.2003

Isolation or Engagemant? The Challenging Case of Belarus

By Christopher Walker

You can tell a lot about a country by the company it keeps. In the case of Belarus, there has been a steady rapprochement between it and some of the world's most unsavory regimes, North Korea and Iraq among them. This process is occurring at a time when many of Belarus' neighbors are working assiduously to consolidate strong relationships with the community of Western countries and moving to join key Western clubs; Minsk is moving just as diligently to deepen relationships with isolated outlaw states. Belarus' troubling friendships and its regime's repressive behavior at home contribute to its pariah status in the West.

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's lack of interest in reform and confrontational posture have thrown its relations with the United States and the European Union into a destructive cycle through which the country's self-isolation and poor behavior begets further isolation from the West. Prospects for a reversal of this negative cycle remain dim. The United States, the European Union, and regional neighbors have been unable to craft a policy for effectively dealing with the Belarusian leadership. At any given time, one is more likely to find relations defined by travel bans and blacklists than by cooperative discussions or meaningful agreements.

There are, however, developments under way that are transforming the existing environment and that will influence how Minsk interacts with the rest of the world. At the regional level, the process of Western integration presses forward. While Minsk during the Lukashenka era has done its best to resist the pull of Western integration, no country can remain immune to the effects of this process indefinitely.

While Minsk during the Lukashenka era has done its best to resist the pull of Western integration, no country can remain immune to the effects of this process indefinitely.

Belarus' EU-bound western neighbors must find working approaches to the real and immediate challenge of difficult EU enlargement issues, including those associated with borders and immigration. For the soon-to-be EU and NATO members, close proximity brings special burdens and responsibilities. Recognizing the staying power of the Belarusian president and without the luxury of relying on an isolation policy, these countries have tended toward a policy of "critical engagement." The Poles, Lithuanians, and Latvians have sought to maintain channels of communication with the Lukashenka regime in hopes of coaxing out more constructive behavior, while at times also serving as a bridge to the EU and other European organizations.

The new Lithuanian government has already signaled its interest in continuing this role. "Lithuania is ready to help Belarus in seeking closer contacts with the EU, but the Belarusian government has to follow thein all, including the Belarusian president -- that was imposed in November at the time of the NATO Prague summit will be lifted as a result of the compromise allowing the new OSCE presence in Minsk. As part of the action against Belarus in November, the Czech Republic also denied President Lukashenka a visa request to allow him to take part in the Prague summit (due to the fact that Belarus is a member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council).

Of course, the most active, if not effective, area of engagement for Belarus is with Russia. For some seven years, Minsk and Moscow have taken part in a slow and awkward dance to find a mutually acceptable nature and degree of integration. But since taking power three years ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin has sharply recalibrated Moscow's approach to Minsk, at times openly questioning the extent of Belarus' contribution to the inchoate union. Belarus, a country of 10 million that is isolated from the West and dependant on Russia for upwards of 90 percent of its energy, indeed has relatively little leverage in the relationship with its enormous neighbor to the east. With no sign of a strategic plan for modernization, nor any inclination to liberalize, Belarus is stuck in place. At the same time, President Putin is driving a harder bargain from the east.

From the west, the carrots of integration seemingly hold little appeal to the Lukashenka regime, which is more comfortable building relationships with the very outlaw regimes the United States and its allies seek to bring to heel. The Belarusian people, caught under inward-looking and autocratic leadership, are for the time being left to face opprobrium and isolation.

Christopher Walker is head of the Rapid Response Unit at the EastWest Institute. The views expressed in this article are the author's own.

Source: RFE/RL Newsline, January 31,2003

Currency Union with Russia: Project with Dangerous Consequences

Ever since former Belarusian Prime Minister Vyacheslau Kebich first floated it in 1993, the idea of a currency union between Belarus and Russia has itself been a currency, helping to earn political capital in exchange for integrationist rhetoric. As such, though, it stood a small chance of implementation. This may now be changing. As promised by Russian President Vladimir Putin during his visit to Minsk on 20 January, the union could become a reality by 2005.

What can possibly make the two countries forgo such an important part of their sovereignty as their national currency? The only economic reason is convenience: Currencies create obstacles to trade and tend to fluctuate, thus creating financial instability. Eliminating these inconveniences is practical, but it comes at a high cost. A tradable national currency enables the state to exercise monetary policy by controlling the quantity of money in circulation on its territory. That can level the effects of natural cycles of expansion and contraction on the country's economy. By reducing the money supply, the government decreases the purchasing power of its citizens, which cools economic activity and reduces inflation. Expansion of money supply stimulates the economy, but it also increases prices.

If the national currency is surrendered and replaced by a currency union, the state's monetary policy is no longer independent. It is transferred to the central bank of another state or to a specially created central bank of the union. In order to survive this surrender of monetary control, member countries of the common currency need to have economic cycles that move in similar phases. Otherwise, a monetary policy designed to constrain inflation in one country would create a recession in another, causing a drop in demand, output, and jobs.

An illustration of this state is today's Germany, with the euro-zone interest rate too high for the German economy, which is experiencing a recession. The union also needs to permit free movement of labor to allow workers from depressed areas to move to booming ones and a common fiscal budget to allow for the direct transfer of cash from economies in expansion to those in recession.

These factors, the existence of which make up what is known as an optimal currency zone, determine the success of the common-currency undertaking. At this time, it is impossible to know if Belarus and Russia qualify as an optimal currency zone.

While Russia, with all its faults, is already a market economy with a relatively independent central bank capable of implementing modern monetary policy, the Belarusian economy is still entirely state-controlled. Not only does it not have institutions for implementing monetary policy, it does not have an economy that would react to that policy one way or another -- Belarus is still to experience its first business cycle. Its economy follows the cycle of administrative distribution and centralized price setting rather than fluctuations of demand and supply that are natural to a market economy. The National Bank of Belarus is fully subordinate to the president's administration for which monetary policy means printing money to ease the fate of loss-making state industries and agricultural companies and thus support political constituencies associated with them.

Predictably, this policy has produced only one result, an inflation rate that was the fifth-highest in the world in the past decade, on par with Angola and Congo, and second-highest in 1999-2000. Moscow's refusal to delegate any monetary authority, let alone the emission center, to such an inflation-prone government is easy to understand.

Few currency unions, however, are created for purely economic purposes. Indeed, themajority, including the euro-zone, have been created for political reasons. In the case of the euro-zone, those reasons were France's and Germany's hopes to influence each other's economic policy via a common currency, which coincided with the desire of the new generation of politicians from the south to import German financial discipline. Any monetary tightening will be accompanied by job losses in many parts of the electorate, so new leaders in Southern Europe have found it easier to impose austerity, if it came as a requirement of the popular process of European integration, rather than a domestic policy that was guaranteed to be unpopular.

Unlike its Southern European counterparts, the Belarusian government did not mean to import Russian economic management. Rather, it walked into its own trap. The unification project still generates much political capital among the Russian electorate, but the problem for Putin has been its unacceptable cost.

The currency union, or, realistically, the absorption of the Belarusian ruble into the Russian one, would be an elegant solution that would generate political capital with little economic cost. It would engage Belarusian businesses and state enterprises into the Russian financial system, limiting the Belarusian regime's control over their ultimate ownership. It is not coincidental that discussions about a common currency intensified simultaneously with Russian attempts to gain Belarusian industrial assets.

It is this potential to create political gain at little economic cost that suggests that this time the project may be seen to completion. **Consequences for Belarus would be dramatic.** On the one hand, the regime of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka would be certainly weakened. It would be left without its main tool to maintain its political power base, the ability to print and inject generous amounts of cash into old industries.

On the other hand, this weakening would hardly help Belarusian independence. Besides the monetary tools, economies are also managed by fiscal instruments, which, in the case of Belarus, have always belonged to its neighbor. Subsidized energy prices are a pure form of fiscal transfer to the state-owned Belarusian economy and, as such, the most powerful fiscal instrument one can imagine. The transfer of the monetary power over Belarus to Moscow would also be logical.

After all, it is possible that Belarus and Russia are indeed an optimal currency zone and that, integrated into the Russian financial market and privatized by Russian oligarchs, Belarus would quickly catch up to the Russian economic cycle. Labor mobility is also conceivable, and fiscal reign over Belarus already belongs to Russia.

But the consequences for Belarus, as a country, would be dramatic: Incorporation of its economy into the Russian realm would create firm grounds for subsequent political incorporation. This is exactly why it is so attractive to expansionists in the East.

This report was written by Siarhej Karol, a graduate of the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies who currently works at AIG, a global financial-services company.

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, March 4, 2003

National Treasure in Peril

By Irina Levshina

Ecologists challenge government's explanation for disappearance of one of the continent's oldest forests.

A delegation of journalists who visited the Bielavieza national park in Belarus on January 29 were confronted with sharply conflicting accounts of why one of the oldest forests in Europe is suddenly disappearing

Since 1998 the forest, which straddles Poland and Belarus, has been subject to a mass felling of trees on the latter's side of the border. The Minsk government claims the centuries-old trees have been struck by hurricanes and mass infestations of beetles. Ecologists and scholars assert that healthy trees are being felled to earn hard currency.

The quest for hard currency is turning our national heritage into timber

Dubbed the "lungs of Europe" for its huge size and variety of trees, the Bielavieza virgin forest is home to over 300 species of animal, including the *zubr* — (european bison) - its mascot. Seventy-five hectares of the forest lie in Belarus, the remaining 55 in Poland.

Until recently, the Minsk government had been regarded as a responsible guardian of this unique natural reserve. In 1992, the forest was placed on UNESCO's international cultural and natural heritage list and received a special certificate from the Council of Europe.

In 1998, a sawmill complex was erected in the town of Kamianiuki, which lies within the forest. Brought in from Germany by the presidential administration, the facility was supposedly intended to chop down sick or damaged trees. The general director of the park, Jauhien Smaktunovic, protested vigorously the arrival of the mill.

In 2001, he was dismissed and his deputy, Georgy Kozulko, was also promptly fired. In May, President Lukashenka appointed a new general director. Lauded in official circles as a skilled economic administrator, Nikolai Bambiza was already a bogeyman for ecologists, having presided over the felling of ancient oaks in the Prypiac national park during his tenure as director there.

Once Bambiza took charge, the mill began actively functioning, but like many activities directed by the presidential administration, work at the forest is conducted in total secrecy. No one knows where the Bielavieza timber goes, or how much the state charges for it.

Last year, an ecological pressure group, Terra-Konventsia, was formed with the aim of forcing the government to fulfil its international environmental obligations. Spearheaded by Valery Drancuk, the editor of the independent ecological newspaper, *Belovezhskaya Pushcha*, the movement has attracted scholars and public figures as well as ecologists and environmentalists.

At a conference last summer, the group appealed to the international community to intervene. "The quest for hard currency is turning an internationally recognised jewel of our natural heritage into fodder for the timber industry," they said in a statement.

The January 29 visit to the forest was organized by the presidential administration to allow critics to visit the forest. Suspicions were raised immediately when both former directors of the national park and Terra-Konventsia director Valery Drancuk were denied accreditation. The journalists were shown huge areas where trees had allegedly been blown down by the wind. Others had been felled because they were infested by beetles, claimed administration representatives.

Bambiza's insistence that "there is no illegal felling in the Bielavieza forest", was undermined somewhat when journalists were approached directly by a timber worker who gave his name as Valery Pucynski. "Everything written in the newspapers about the felling of the forest is true. I'm ashamed for the park," he said. This unscripted intervention made a strong impression on the visitors, despite claims by administration officials that Pucynski is "sick".

Excluded from the official party, Valery Drancuk spent the day in Kamianiuki. "The forest has been taken over by an industrial lobby. Local residents have described many times how the forest is being chopped down and taken away," he told journalists.

Unable to stop the felling, local people have resisted by refusing to join in. The forest is an integral part of their lives and the majority have chosen unemployment rather than work in the sawmill. Most of the workers there are outsiders or "temps" as the locals call them.

Hamstrung domestically, ecologists and the former heads of the reserve now intend to draw the Council of Europe's attention to the felling. EU officials have yet to issue any statement on the matter.

Irina Levshina is a reporter for BelaPAN news agency in Minsk.

Source: BRS No. 02, 31 Jan. 2003



What is being done to our Pušča ?

Save Our Forest !

We, the hereditary residents of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha forest reserve, write this letter to you in hope for understanding and help by the leader of our state, our countrymen and world community.

Our land, which is the natural heritage of mankind, is in great danger. They continue to cut down timber here against the law, transporting the wood outside of the park's territory. Belavezhskaya Pushcha is rapidly losing its original look. We see only one reason for that – personal greediness and thirst for riches. With aching hearts we are watching them stealing the national treasures through constant machinations and illicit deals, thus turning our land into an uninhabited space and us – into helpless aboriginals.

We are aged 60, 70 and 80. What we see sinks us deep into bewilderment and confusion but nobody really cares for us, yet alone for our opinion. We, the original inhabitants of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha are exposed to the premeditated terror. Everyone, who was born here, has a family and continues to work in the forest, faces the danger to lose his job and income.

Hundreds of us have been already fired, including specialists, scientific personnel and ordinary workers. We've no idea what will happen to us next. By this appeal we hope to attract the attention of the Belarusian president, our countrymen, all structures and institutes, which consider it their duty to intervene into this arbitrary course of affairs. At the same time we plead with the head of state and the governments of the world to help us out, even by visiting the forest reserve personally. We want to save Belavezhskaya Pushcha from demolition and to protect ourselves.

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, March 7, 2003

ECONOMY

Lukashenka: "No Step Forward in Prices!"

By Vital Silitski

At the February 11, 2003 Cabinet's Report, President Lukashenka attacked his government for the poor state of the national economy in the year 2002, giving the cabinet three months' time to make up for the unsatisfactory performance. He blamed his ministers for the fact that only a half of the 16 major targets for socio-economic development had been reached. These targets are a part of the largely arbitrary, centrally planned, yearly economic forecast. Yet, Belarus still claimed a GDP growth of 4.7% in 2001, achieved by: squeezing the profit margins to the point that little remains for reinvestment or replacement of worn out capital assets, and the setting of mandatory production targets, with most of the increased production being stockpiled. Little real progress has been achieved in raising the standard of living, improving the country's export potential, reducing the trade deficit, curbing inflation, or coping with the accumulation of unsold goods piling up at warehouses.

The president further criticized the government's inability to achieve an additional 2% in GDP growth and to cut production costs in industry and agriculture by 20% and 30%, respectively, (such arbitrary targets fully reflect Lukashenka's style of governing). Finally, Lukashenka revealed the height of his displeasure when he attacked the government for allowing a sharp rise in prices for state-owned housing and utilities. "This year will be the year of protecting our people, including from its own government, from that robbery that you allow, taking from our population the last money, and sometimes putting your hands into the empty pocket where you did not put anything," he declared in the televised dressing down of his cabinet. He immediately ordered a price freeze on these services, requiring the government to "clearly calculate the current prices for these services" ... "and allow no step forward in prices."

The most significant political challenge to Lukashenka stems from the populist promises he made during his 2001 presidential campaign, to substantially raise wages. The average monthly wage in Belarus has grown from $40 in 1999 to $108 in 2001, a gain that unfortunately was almost entirely wiped out by inflation. Still, this increase proved to be sustainable as a result of reducing the number of price controlled basic goods from thirty-three to nine, and by the elimination of 'cross-subsidizing' (a price setting practice wherein consumers are first subsidized by setting low prices for goods and services at the producers' expense, then the producers' losses are compensated through setting low nominal wages in the public sector). This approach brought about a reduction in the re-distributive role of the government, for which it earned rare praise from the International Monetary Fund in its February assessment of economic developments in the country. Overall, these nomi-

nal wage hikes hardly brought about a substantial improvement to the standard of living, as prices in Belarus nearly doubled in the dollar equivalent in the last three years.

As far as the state owned public utilities are concerned, Belarusians now pay 20 times more for hot water, 14 times more for housing, and 11 times more for gas, in dollar equivalent, than they did in 1999. At that time, the total spending for an average family on these items barely reached two dollars. A new price increase in January of this year brought the average household's housing and utility bill to $30-$40. This latest hike was made necessary by price increases of gas imports from Russia, and by the need to clear the public wage arrears at the end of 2002, which emptied the state budget. Since consumers' payments still cover only a half of housing and utility costs, there is little doubt that prices of housing and utilities will increase still further in the nearest future.

It should be noted that income redistribution and maintenance of a relatively low cost of living has been Lukashenka's major argument in defense of his economic policies, and against wide-scale economic reforms. In the last eight years, official media spared no effort in scaring the society away from the very idea of reform by publicizing examples of misery and devastation allegedly resulting from reform measures in neighboring countries, primarily Russia and the Ukraine. Such propaganda included regularly televised pictures of apartment dweller freezing without electricity and gas in the Russian Far East and Siberian regions.

However, Lukashenka's redistributive policies proved to be unsustainable, causing growing public dissatisfaction with the president and his style of government. Anxious about paying the political costs for his policies, especially before the possible referendum on the extension of his term of office, Lukashenka has tried once again to shift the blame for his failures onto the cabinet. He portrays himself to the people as the guardian of their interests, protecting them from negligent and corrupt officials. Belarusian analysts express little doubt that when the government reports to the president in April, it will be dismissed in a showpiece reprisal. The paradox is that Lukashenka, nevertheless, has no choice but to allow some of the reforms to proceed, what with the public sector running out of steam and with Russia no longer willing to subsidize his unorthodox economic policy experiments. However, by strangely balancing limited reforms with state control, Lukashenka has on one hand, ordered the state monopolization of foreign trade and has frozen prices on housing and utilities, and on the other, he has called for reforms in the agricultural sector, signed a decree allowing privatization of the industrial giants, and is expected to relieve the onerous licensing rules for small business. Finally, if these contradictory reforms further damage the economy, a new set of government ministers should be prepared to clear out their offices.

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Moscow May Soon Acquire Belarusian Gas Network

After months of friction, Belarus is moving to let Russia take over its gas network even sooner than Moscow originally demanded. Earlier this month, unidentified Belarusian officials told the Interfax news agency that the government will turn the state gas firm Beltranshaz into an open joint-stock company before 1 April.

The privatization next month could effectively allow neighboring Russia's natural-gas monopoly Gazprom to gain control even earlier than the 1 July target date agreed to in December.

The speedup seems to be part of a remarkable recovery in relations, which fell apart in a fury last August after President Lukashenka blasted President Vladimir Putin's proposal to unify the countries' currencies at the start of next year. The union treaty calls for the monetary merger to take place in January 2004, which has now been reaffirmed as the date for adopting the Russian ruble in Belarus.

Lukashenka never fully explained the reasons for his outburst, although he apparently hopes to have influence over the "emissive center," or, in other words, the central bank that will print the currency. In order to secure a reasonable deal on converting its currency into Russian rubles, Belarus needs more time to bring its annual inflation rate of 34.8 percent into line with Russia's rate of 15.1 percent last year. In dollar terms, the Belarusian ruble is worth about one-sixtieth of its Russian counterpart.

The fight over currency coincided with a conflict over Russia's heavily subsidized gas exports to Belarus, which Gazprom cut by half in October and threatened to stop altogether due to nonpayment of debts. Both problems were resolved during fence-mending meetings in Moscow in November, resulting in very little payment by Belarus but a promise to privatize Beltranshaz by July in response to Russia's demands. The decision was confirmed during Putin's visit to Minsk last month. The network will be a prize for Gazprom as it seeks to extend its reach beyond Russia and to restore its control over all former Soviet export routes to Europe.

A parallel process is occurring in Ukraine, where President Leonid Kuchma has agreed, after much resistance, to set up an international consortium with Russia as an equal partner to manage its transit lines. As with the Belarusian currency issue, the terms of who will control the consortium have been kept ambiguous.

But Lukashenka's decision to convert Beltranshaz into a joint-stock company ahead of schedule may not be unrelated to Gazprom's breakthrough with Kuchma in Ukraine. Interfax quoted a government resolution as saying that the decision to privatize the company "was made in the interests of attracting investments for developing the country's gas-transport system." The consortium in Ukraine is also seeking investment capital to renew the country's aging transit lines.

What began as reluctance may have turned into a race to see which country will allow Gazprom in first. While Ukraine has carried up to 90 percent of Russia's gas traffic to Europe, Belarus could gain a greater share, along with an assurance of subsidized gas for years to come. Earlier this month, Interfax reported that Russia's new Yamal Peninsula pipeline will open in Belarus in mid-2003, allowing shipments through Poland to Germany.

Like Ukraine, Belarus may well seek a face-saving formula to avoid the impression of a Russian takeover of its gas system. Lukashenka has shown little liking for privatizing large state enterprises in the past. Simultaneously, Belarusian officials denied that the government would trade interest in Beltranshaz for what it claimed was $130 million in gas debts. But the effect may be much the same if Gazprom acquires the firm and eventually pays itself. The government has estimated the company's basic assets at 600 billion Belarusian rubles ($306.6 million), plus 85 billion rubles for distribution and storage facilities.

Beginning this month, Gazprom has demanded that all gas payments from Belarus be made in cash, while the independent gas trader Itera has required 30 percent advance payment for deliveries, RBC News reported. Belarus was said to owe $226 million at the start of the year for imported fuel.

Both Belarus and Ukraine have become more open to Russia's suggestions on gas transit and share ownership since Gazprom pressed plans to build a North European pipeline project across the Baltic Sea. The $5.3 billion underwater line would link Russia directly with Germany, the Netherlands, and eventually Great Britain. While such a project seemed unlikely when it was first proposed more than a year ago, Russia's experience with the recently opend Blue Stream gas line acros the Black Sea to Turkey may make the plan more feasible now.

RFE/RL correspondent Michael Lelyveld wrote this report.

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, February 18, 2003

Closure of Lithuania's Nuclear-Power Station May Affect Belarus

Lithuania's president-elect, Rolandas Paksas, has stated that he intends to approach the European Union for help in constructing a new, Western-type nuclear-power station. This commitment to nuclear energy will have considerable implications for Belarus, which currently purchases a significant amount of its electricity from Lithuania. Moreover, Lithuania's existing (Soviet-built) nuclear-power station at Ignalina is of the RBMK type, similar to that which blew up at Chornobyl in April 1986.

Ignalina is close to the Lithuanian-Belarusian frontier, and a Chornobyl-type accident there could expose northwestern Belarus to heavy radioactive contamination similar to that suffered by the southeast in 1986. Over the past 10 years, Lithuania has been negotiating over Ignalina with the EU, which wants it closed. Some 250 million euros ($264 million) has been spent on improving safety, but the radical design faults of this type of reactor cannot be eliminated.

Under pressure from the EU, the Lithuanians have promised to close down Ignalina: The first reactor is due to be shut down in 2005 and the second in 2009, with the EU bearing much of the estimated 3 billion-euro cost of decommissioning.

However, Lithuanian energy and financial experts are unhappy about the closure: Ignalina at present produces 70 percent of Lithuania's electrical output and is a vital source of export revenue.

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka of Belarus is likewise not happy about the impending closure. Last year, he made an apparently serious offer to buy the station from Lithuania (with necessary adjustment of the international border so that the station would be on Belarusian territory). This came to nothing.

However, recent disputes between Belarus and Russia over fossil-fuel supplies have caused Belarusian energy experts to start thinking seriously again about nuclear power. Lithuania and Belarus share the problem of insufficient energy resources of their own.

But Lithuania suffered relatively little from Chornobyl fallout, while public opinion remembers vividly the Soviet fossil-fuel embargo that followed Lithuania's 1990 declaration of independence. Hence, statements such as that of outgoing President Valdas Adamkus that, "Nuclear energy is the cleanest and cheapest energy in the world, and Lithuania cannot refuse it," and his successor's commitment to a new and safer replacement for Ignalina cause no major shock to public opinion.

Belarus, however, received an estimated 70 percent of the Chornobyl fallout, and as a result plans for a nuclear-power-plus-district-heating station on the outskirts of Minsk were abandoned. When, on the sixth anniversary of the Chornobyl disaster, the then-head of state of Belarus, Stanislau Shushkevich, stated that, sooner or later, Belarus would have to have nuclear energy of its own, Belarusian public opinion was shocked that the man who had done so much in the late 1980s to reveal the extent of the Chornobyl contamination should say such a thing.

Now, very cautiously, suggestions that Belarus must eventually build its own nuclear-power plants are beginning to be voiced in Belarus but only in terms of some undefined future. If Paksas's hopes of a new, EU-financed, Western-style nuclear-power plant for Lithuania materialize — and if Belarus can continue to pay its bills for electricity exports — then the problems, economic and psychological, of launching a nuclear-power program for Belarus can be deferred.

But if Ignalina closes without the EU financing a new Lithuanian station to replace it, Belarus may have to think seriously about its own nuclear option.

This report was written by Vera Rich, a London-based freelance researcher.

Source: RFE/Rl Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, January 14, 2003

Culture & History

Magdalena Radzivil and the Greek-Catholic Church

By Alexander Nadson

Among the distinguished representatives of the Belarusian national and religious renaissance at the beginning of the 20th century Princess Magdalena Radzivil (1861-1945) by no means occupies the least prominent place. It is unfortunate that her life and work have not until now attracted the attention of Belarusian historians. [1]

Magdalena Radzivil was born in Warsaw, but her roots reached deep into the Belarusian heritage. Her father, Jan Zavisha (1820-1887), was a well-known archaeologist, who excavated and studied artefacts from the Stone Age in the districts of Ihumien and Navahradak, and took part in the International Archaeological congresses of Venice (1871) and Budapest (1876). [2] He belonged to those representatives of leading Belarusian families, who regardless of any prevailing polonisation remained patriots of their native land and played an important role in the study of the history and culture of Belarus. Such were also the two brothers, Counts Constantine and Eustace Tyshkievich, Uladyslau Syrakomla, Honoré Kirkor and others. Among themselves they usually spoke Polish, although they were fully familiar with the Belarusian language, which they used in communicating with the country-folk. Some of them, such as Alexander Jelski, endeavoured to write in Belarusian.

A significant proportion of the Zavisha estates lay within the counties of Minsk and Ihumien, centring on their country mansion of Kuchcicy, some five miles from Uzda. There Magdalena spent a large part of her childhood. And there it seems, not without some paternal influence, she conceived a love for Belarus and the Belarusian people which later determined her consciousness of national appurtenance. Together with Magdalena's own orientation, her relationship with her mother, who was Polish, was not particularly happy: "I myself from childhood could appreciate the distinction which my mother made between me and my sister, who was her little pet, regarding which I felt a resentment against such favouritism. One had to put up with it, but the bitterness remains" (Letter to Fr. Andrej Cikota, 27 July 1929). [3] Perhaps this factor also played a part in Magdalena's national consciousness. It is curious that nothing is known of her elder sister Eva having any kind of interest in Belarus.

In 1881 Magdalena was married to the Polish Count Ludvik Krasinski. She received by way of dowry the Zharnouki estate (also in Ihumien county) together with more than 60,000 acres of land. [4] By 1895 Magdalena was left a widow with a little daughter Louise. She travelled widely through Europe and then in 1906 she was married for a second time to Prince Nicholas Radzivil, nineteen years her junior. He was a swashbuckling young man who among the Poles had the reputation of being a "Russophile". He received his primary schooling with the Jesuits, after which he continued his secondary education at the prestigious Corps des Pages in St. Petersburg. As a young man of eighteen, he volunteered for service in the British Army and took part in the South African (Boer) War (1899-1902). When in 1904 the Russo-Japanese War broke out, he again joined up, this time in the Russian Army. His marriage to a wealthy Polish aristocrat, old enough to be his mother, met with the disapproval of the upper echelons of Polish society. This may well have accounted for the final break between Magdalena Radzivil and her husband on the one hand and the Polish establishment on the other. By happy coincidence in that same year 1906 there began to appear the first legal Belarusian journal *Nasha Dola*, and shortly afterwards *Nasha Niva*, and the Belarusian national revival began to grow in strength. At about this time Magdalena Radzivil began ever more frequently to assume the role of supporter and benefactress of the Belarusian movement.

Married life seems to have had little influence on the character of Nicholas Radzivil. From 1912-1913 he was involved in the Balkans in the ranks of the Bulgarian Army, first in action against the Turks, then against the Serbs and Greeks. The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 found him in Germany. By way of France and England he found his way home, where he at once enlisted in the Russian Army. But he was not destined to campaign for long: on 17th November (Old style) 1914 he was killed in East Prussia.His funeral took place in Kuchcicy on 26th November. He was buried by the Belarusian Catholic priest Fr. A. Astramovich. In his graveside oration in the Belarusian language, he said that the Prince "loved the simple Belarusian language and contributed towards its ressurgence and the renaissance of the Belarusian people. The death of the Prince is a great loss for the Princess. It is also a loss for all those dwelling on the estate, and for the whole Belarusian nation. In the person of the late Prince, Belarusians have lost a staunch defender of everything pertaining to their revival, lost him at the time when the star of a new and better life has appeared, when the sun had begun to shine in at our window". [5]

Fr Alexander Astramovich (1878-1921) was the parish priest of Anapal near Minsk. He is better known as the poet Andrej Ziaziula. To his pen we owe the poem *Bozha, shto kalis narody* ("O God, who once divided men into nations"), which for many years served as the Belarusian religious hymn. The fact that he, and not the parish priest of Uzda to which Kuchcichy belonged, conducted the funeral service bears witness not only to the Belarusian patriotism of the dead Prince, but also to the national orientation of his widow.

At the time Magdalena Radzivil lived mainly at Kuchcicy or in Minsk. Those who knew her relate how the doors of her home were always open to Belarusians In 1917-1918 the Princess' residence in vul. Zakharava in Minsk was a meeting place for Belarusian activists.

As a deeply religious and committed Catholic Magdalena Radzivil understood the importance of nationally conscious clergy and the need for a wider use of the

national language in ecclesiastical life. She kept in touch with Belarusian priests, the number of which, in spite of difficulties was steadily increasing. Among these priests she had a particular regard for Fr. Francis Budzka (1884-1920) and a Professor at the St. Petersburg Catholic Theological Academy, Jazep Bielahalovy (1883, died in Soviet captivity c. 1928). With Fr. Fabian Abrantovich she became more familiar after 1914, when he returned after completing his studies at Louvain University to be appointed professor at the Mahilou theological seminary, which was then functioning in St. Petersburg. When a number of young Belarusian priests and students at the Petersburg academy (Adam Stankievich, Andrej Tsikota, Victor Shutovich, Vincent Hadleuski, Lucian Khvietska and others) founded a society, the Princess gave money to establish a Belarusian library. [6] She also provided financial support for the first Belarusian Catholic weekly "Belarus" [7] which was produced in Vilnia from 1913-15. Thanks to her assistance a number of religious books were published in Belarusian, including the first serious prayer-book *"Boh z nami"* [God is with us] (Vilnia 1915) by the editor of the newspaper "Belarus" Balaslau Pachopka, and also "A shortened Bible" by I. Schuster (in two editions 1907 and 1917). [8]

When the bolsheviks occupied Belarus in 1918, Magdalena Radzivil was obliged to leave that country for ever. After a brief sojourn in Warsaw, she went to Germany where she first settled in Hermsdorf in Silesia, and later in Godesberg not far from Cologne. In a letter to Fr. A. Tsikota she explained why she was unable to remain in Poland, which then incorporated Western Belarus: "I often reproach myself with having a tranquil existence when war is raging in my Belarusian homeland ('w mojej bialoruskiej Ojczyznie wrze wojna'). But although in good health, I have become so weak that I would not be of any use there, even if my nerves could stand having to deal with those revolting citizens of the Kingdom ('z przebrzydlymi koroniarzami' [i.e. from the denizens of the Kingdom of Poland, as distinct from Belarusians and Lithu nians who were the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy - A.N.])" (Letter, 27th July 1929).

Her material circumstances were greatly altered: "It seems that your reverence does not take into account my financial position. Most of what I owned is now in the hands of the bolsheviks across the frontier. What little I possess in Poland proper is even further reduced by exceptional taxes, gifts for the Fatherland, requisitions and also because of a dishonest administration. I have considerable debts, so that what remains of my income, after allowing for interest on loans and pensions payable to my former servants and their widows, I am left with barely enough to live on in a convent in the country. Please do not expect anything from me, for I have nothing to give". (Letter to Fr. A. Tsikota 22nd January 1929)

Nevertheless, regardless of difficulties, the Princess did not cease helping the Belarusians, although not on the same scale as previously. Thus, in February 1928 she sent 1000 Polish zlotys to Fr. Abrantovich who was preparing to leave for Manchuria, and 400 German marks in August, just before his departure. On the 5th January 1929 she sent three hundred zlotys to Fr Tsikota, asking him to apply it to "some urgent need of our people". There were other gifts - 300 marks on 6th November 1929, and 500 marks on 8th July 1930.

But supplicants did not always get what they asked for. In August 1928 Fr. A. Tsikota asked for help in publishing Fr. V. Hadleuski's "History" - omitting to specify that this was a "History of the Old Testament" - and in helping towards the requirements of a newly founded community of nuns in Druja. The Princess's reply was clearly unexpected: "History is a subject which depends on the opinions of the author... It is clear to me that Fr Hadleuski and I do not share the same point of view, and for that reason I will not contribute towards his publication. Insofar as the nuns' convent is concerned, it may well become the ornament of the Church, though this is something which time will tell; but for the moment I would rather give help to a community already in existence and doing useful work, founded say some 80 years ago..." (Letter, 13th August 1928).

The only contact which the Princess had with her homeland was by letter, but many of those who had once benefitted from her generosity forgot about her. One of the few, who kept in touch with her, was Balaslau Pachopka. He was married, with a large family, and became a priest of the Eastern rite in 1926. He was appointed by Bishop Zygmunt Lozinski of Pinsk to the Greek-Catholic parish of Babrovichy in Palessie. Magdalena Radzivil out of her meagre resources helped him to build a church which was consecrated in 1932. [9] This did not however prevent her from adopting a critical attitude to some of the modalities of his pastoral work.

During the years from 1927 to 1931 the Princess kept up a relatively lively correspondence with Frs Fabian Abrantovich and Andrej Tsikota. After 1931 contact between them ceased.

Ecclesiastical life in Belarus, particularly the question of Church Unity played a large part in the thoughts of Magdalena Radzivil. She did not hold high hopes that the Polish Roman Catholic Church would support any rapprochement between Orthodox and Catholics: "There are moments of sober reflexion when I understand that any sacrifice for the Faith, even if in Japan, is a good thing, which may result in blessings for the country which is near to our heart. If the Pinsk seminary (concerning which I have no doubt) will contribute towards the betterment of the Latin clergy, then by the same reason it may attract the Orthodox to the bosom of the Catholic Church; but there are times when, in the place of a Latin priest, I find a Polish fanatic ('ale przychodza chwile kiedy za lacinskim ksiedzem widze fanatyka Polaka')" (Letter to Fr Fabian Abrantovich, 18th May 1928)

In general she took a somewhat critical view of the Catholic Church in Poland: "Throughout Europe civilisation came by way of the Church. She taught people how to think, and not to sit in church all day. But in Poland, apart from piety of the most rudimentary kind, i.e. attending divine service, observing fastdays and participating in the sacraments, she taught the people nothing" (Letter to Fr. F. Abrantovich 25th April 1928).

Among other instances, although not strictly relevant to the present theme, in order the better to understand the character of Magdalena Radzivil, it is worth considering her thoughts on anti-semitism: "I take the view that anti-semitism is an evil thing, if only because the hatred of the race to which she belonged cannot have been pleasant to our Blessed Lady; and also because only those Jews who were in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion of the Son of God, incurred a curse upon themselves and their descendants. For that however, we cannot blame the Jews who were living then in other parts of the Roman Empire. I hope I am not uttering any heresies" (Letter to Fr. F. Abrantovich, 15th February 1928).

With these kinds of principles it would have been difficult for Magdalena to remain in a country where anti-semitism was beginning to flourish, as well as the growing influence of fascism in political life, together with its anti-Christian ideology. In 1932 she left for Switzerland, where she lived out the remainder of her life.

Magdalena Radzivil was pained by the division of the Church, which came about in Belarus as a consequence of the suppression of the Uniate Church in 1839, and took the view that the responsibilty for this tragedy lay largely with the representatives of the Belarusian upper classes, who abandoned their people: "I am always distressed by the thought that, in abandoning the Eastern rite, my forebears did a fearful wrong to Catholicism, in that by joining the stronger Church for secular advantages, they consequently weakened the 'Unia', which stood in greater need of protection, and which as a result of the defection of its educated classes, lapsed into an inequality from which it had no strength to contend with schism. I take the view that on us, the descendants of the Uniates, who betrayed our national Faith for reasons of snobbery, lies the responsibility for the abandoning of Catholicism by some and dreadful sufferings by other simple people, who remained faithful to the original teachings of SS. Cyril and Methodius." (Letter to Fr. F. Abrantovich 18th May 1928) .

In her dreams of a revival of the "Unia", the Princess was unable to applaud the methods adopted by some of the new "apostles" of that ideal: "Honour demands that the representatives of the Truth should not adopt, in order to proclaim it, those methods adopted by heretics ('do jakich sie uciekaja kacerze'). I refer to one particular Belarusian parish priest, who naively congratulated himself on bringing schismatics back to the Church, by charging lower fees for religious services than the Orthodox priests. This was a heroic gesture on his part, since the poor fellow has a large family, but this sort of propaganda promises little: the Orthodox priest only has to lower his own fees, and he will win back his erstwhile parishioners." (Letter to Fr . A. Tsikota, 9th April 1928). At the beginning of the 20th century the idea of the "Unia" had many advocates amongst those working for a Belarusian renaissance. Among the priesthood were Adam Stankievich, Jazep Hermanovich (the poet Vintsuk Advazhny), Kanstantyn Stepovich (the poet Kazimier Svajak) and others. In the Catholic newspaper "Krynitsa" in the 1920's there regularly appeared a "Corner on the 'Unia'". In the mid-1920s references to the Unia took a noticeable turn for the worse. The reason was that the charge of the Union movement in Western Belarus had been entrusted to the Papal "Pro Russia" Commission. The name, as the French Jesuit Bishop deHerbigny, Chairman of the Commission, explained to the Polish Episcopate was in fact "Pro Russia Ecclesiae unienda" or "For the union of Russia to the Church". One of the establishments for the training of future missionaries for Russia was the Jesuit convent in Albertyn near Slonim, founded at the end of 1924. Belarusians could not but be wary of the subjection of their interests to Russians, and they viewed with suspicion these Polish Jesuits decked out as Russian priests. It was clear to them that this was not the way to implement the restoration of the Union in Belarus. [10]

Princess Radzivil responded on this count with her characteristic refusal to compromise: "I must confess that I have no confidence in some fantastical advancement of the Unia by Polish Jesuits masquerading around in Eastern garb ('polskich Jezuitøw maskaradujacych w ubraniu wschodnim'). I note that the true welfare of the Unia is served by those Belarusian priests who are wholeheartedly devoted to it and are ready to endure all things for it even until death ('Sadze, ze prawdziwy interes Unii wymaga Xiezy bialoruskich, z serca da niej przywiazanych i z zamiarem wytrwania w jej do smierci'); but I am perturbed by a system of Latin-rite temporaries committed to the Unia for a period of two or three years. I have received a letter from one Balaslau Pachopka, a married man with a family, whom Bishop Lozinski appointed as a parish priest. He has apparently the consciousness of being a Belarusian but, being very poor, he has for material reasons to work towards the polonisation of his parishioners, and a polonised Uniate adopts the Latin rite. None of this inspires any confidence in the Orthodox, and I dream of the time when a genuine Uniate, ordained by a Uniate bishop after studying at a Uniate seminary will devote his life to this goal. Our people are not such fools as to be taken in by Latin posturers ('Nasz narod zbyt madry by sie dac oszukac przez komediantow lacinskich'). I do not believe that a Latin can genuinely adopt the Eastern rite; he may, like Fr. Abrantovich work for it, but it will always be for him something alien... And do not our churchmen [of the Latin-rite - A.N.] at the bottom of their hearts think of the 'Unia' as a bridge, across which the schismatics can be led back into the bosom of the Latin Church?..." (Letter to Fr. A. Tsikota, 29th July 1929).

It is worth reverting to the main idea of the princess, namely that for a rebirth of the 'Unia' they must have their own priests whole-heartedly dedicated to the ideal of Christian unity. And for that it is indispensible that they should have their own Uniate seminary, where the future apostles of the 'Unia' can receive the appropriate training. The notion of a Greek-Catholic seminary was in no-wise a novel one for Magdalena Radzivil: already in 1917 she had donated a valuable diamond necklace for the foundation of such an establishment in Rome. But what became of that gift is the subject of another story.

NOTES

1. To date the following more substantial articles devoted to Magdalena Radzivil have appeared in the Belarusian

language: I. M. Kniahinia Magdalena Matylda Radzivil, Studencki Klich. No. 9, Munich 1947, ss.8-12; H. Pichura, Kniahinia Magdalena Radzivil, Bozhym Shlakham, No. 2, Londan 1965, ss. 8-9; St. H., Da uspaminau ab kniahini Mahdalene Radzivil, Bozhym Shlakham No. 6, London 1965 s. 19; Mikola Bahadziazh, Ja - belaruska, Belaruskaia minuushchyna No. 1 Mensk 1996, ss. 37-39 The articles of G. Pichura and St. H. were recently reprinted in the directory: Belaruskiia relihiinyia dzeiachy XX stahodzdzia, Mensk-Munich 1999. ss. 350-353.

2. Belaruskaia Encyklapedyia, T. 6, Mensk 1998 s. 493; Encyklapedyia historyi Belarusi T. 5, Mensk 1996, s. 393 (The date of birth of Jan Zavisa is incorrectly given as 1852)

3. The copy of this and other letters, quoted in the present article, are to be found in the in the MSS archive collection of the F. Skaryna Library in London, File "Magdalena Radzivil". Magdalena was able to converse in Belarusian, but was unable, or did not choose to write in that language, and in correspondence with Belarusian or Lithuanian activists she made use of the Polish language.

4. Slownik geograficzny Krolewstwa Polskiego. Tom XIV, Warszawa 1895, s. 745.

5. Bielarus, No. 52, Vilnia 1914.

6. A. Stankievich, Bielaruski chryscijanski ruch. Vilnia 1939, s. 66.

7. A. Stankievich, op. cit., s. 70.

8. In a letter of 22 January 1929 to Fr. A Tsikota the princess wrote: "I am amazed that there is no Old and New Testaments in the Belarusian language, for I gave to the late Fr Budzka of blessed memory a sum of money to cover the costs of such a publication, and received from him a copy of these books". This related doubtless notto the Bible, but to Schuster's "History" (Shortened Bible).

9. P. Poczobko, Kaplan unicki rodem z Wilenszczyzny. Jablonna 1999, s. 289. The Church in Babrovichy (Ivacevichy distr.) dedicated to St. John the Evangelist and St. Paraskieva (1932) is no longer extant

10. If the truth were told, the Fathers of Albertyn themselves appreciated the anomaly of their position, and from the early 1930s, without abandoning their pro-Russian stance, attempted to diffuse their pastoral and didactic work among the Belarusians in their own native language. However, this realisation came too late, and the Belarusians viewed them with suspicion. Fr Adam Stankievich gave a critical appraisal of their work: "The Uniates also made, and are making attempts at Belarusian religious activity in the didactic field. This work is being directed by the Polish Jesuits. For some years they have been publishing a monthly (in the Cyrillic alphabet) 'Da Zluchennia' and now they are editing the same monthly 'Zluchennie' in the Latin script. However this work was always insincere and offered almost nothing by way of religious culture to Belarusian people". (A. Stankievich, op. cit., s. 211)

Source: Belarusians in Britain & Ireland Web Site, 2001

Historical Dates

March 24, 1794

Beginning of the anti-Russian uprising under the leadership of **Tadeuš Kaściuška** (Kosciuszko)

February 2, 1838

Birthdate of **Kastuś Kalinouski,** leader of the anti-Russian national uprising of 1863-1864.

March 21, 1840

Birthdate of **Francišak Bahuševič,** poet, lawyer and pioneer of the Belarusian national revival.



F. Bahuševič

March 22, 1864

Execution of **Kastuś Kalinouski** by the Russian czarist authorities, in Vilnia.

March 24, 1910

Birthdate of **Barys Kit** — professor, a leading American researcher in the field of rocket fuels. Member of the International Academy of Astronautics in Paris.

March 25, 1918

Belarus' Independence Day (Day of Freedom) — Belarusian Democratic Republic (BNR) was declared an independent state by the Executive Council of the First All-Belarusian Congress, in Miensk.

The Janka Kupała State University of Horadnia

is offering a wide range of intensive courses in Belarusian and Russian for international students with different levels of language knowledge. The curriculum includes these languages, as well Belarusian history, literature and science; literature and language workshops; historical regional day trips.

The program starts July 1, 2003 with May 1 deadline for registration. The course of instruction can last from 2- 13 weeks, and also can be one-on-one. The cost of tuition and accommodations is quite reasonable.

For particulars, you can contact the University's Center for International Education by e-mail: lang@mail.grsu.grodno.by, or call 375 152 443399, or fax 375 17 2108599.

Additional information is printed in the newsletter (January 2003, NewsNet v.43, n.1) of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

Remarks at Commemoration of General Kosciuszko's (Kaściuška's) 257th Birth Anniversary

as prepared for delivery by Ambassador Michael Kozak, Chief of U.S. Mission

Kosovo, Belarus -- February 4, 2003

I'd like to thank the Brest Regional Executive Committee for the invitation to come to Kosovo to commemorate the 257th anniversary of the birth of Tadeusz Kosciuszko. It is indeed an honor to be here. A monument to Kosciuszko stands in front of the White House in Washington DC, a fitting tribute to one of the great heroes of the American Revolution.

He fought for the freedom of the United States at a time when his own country was not free. His strategic engineering genius was a major factor in the first major victory of the American Revolution in 1777 at Saratoga. This triumph, viewed by most historians as the turning point of the war, convinced France and other European powers to support the American struggle for independence.

Kosciuszko's military genius is recognized by historians but less is known about him as a person.

He was from here — tutejshy — and you all know what special meaning that word has in Belarus. The key to his military science and his political theory came from growing up here — in Kosovo.

In his political writings, Kosciuszko is a complete Republican — well ahead of many of his American colleagues. He sounds more like an American of 1877 than one of 1777. We can see that many of his beliefs were a direct result of his being from here.

Among his beliefs were that:

"Nations can be based on shared interests and territory and need not be based on uniformity of language and culture."

"Serfdom and slavery are bad and ought to be abolished."

"The vote in a republic should be extended to a significant fraction of the population."

Radical ideas for his time but clearly a product of living in Kosovo — where his neighbors were of different cultures and languages but were all from here.

His political views led to a remarkable friendship between him and Thomas Jefferson which lasted throughout his adult life. During the years that he lived in Philadelphia, the two met almost daily — he was one of the few people with whom Jefferson liked to talk political theory. He was the sort of person that young Jefferson was in the process of becoming. When Kosciuszko spoke Republican theory to Jefferson, his was the voice of two hundred years of experience--from here.

As you know, Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence and most of the Bill of Rights in our Constitution, is considered to be one of the major architects of our political system.

People who believe in historical inevitability frequently try to help history along by their intervention. So it was with Kosciuszko in the American Revolution. He came to fight in the American Revolution assuming that he and his comrades would die in the war — sparking the famous adage — for your freedom and ours.

Kosciuszko lived by his ideas. Jefferson said of him —"He is the purest son of liberty that I have ever known, and of that liberty which is to go to all, not to the few and rich alone."

A nobleman of modest means, he freed all of his serfs here in Kosovo and gave them land. When given a man servant during the American Revolution, he asked —"What am I to do with him?" Told that he can do as he pleases, he gave the man his freedom. Provided with considerable sums and thousands of acres of land for his service to America by the U.S. Congress, in his will, he instructed Jefferson to sell the land and use his entire estate to buy the freedom of slaves. Each freed slave was also to be provided with an education--including an education in how to be a good citizen, and was given the means to provide for himself and his family.

For Kosciuszko believed that it is not enough to give someone freedom — they must be taught how to use, appreciate and protect this freedom. Words that are as true today as they were more than 200 years ago.

It is a great pleasure for me to join you in honoring the memory of this great man, who took the lessons and experiences from this land and this town and put them to great use in shaping my land — the United States of America.

Source: http://www.usis.minsk.by/

March 13, 2003

OSCE, Embassy Officials Seem to Care Little for Situation Development in Belarus

Representatives of the OSCE mission in Minsk and foreign embassies ignored the judicial proceedings against the organizers of the People's March for Better Life, which was held yesterday. Observers, dressed in bright yellow T-shirts with OSCE blue letters, as well as foreign embassies' officials, who usually attend all politically motivated trials, weren't there in the Sovietsky district police station this time.

The OSCE mission is called observatory, but what are these people observing here? Or maybe OSCE no longer cares for the human rights and freedoms in Belarus? Could this indifference be a result of the parliament's recent recognition by OSCE PA?

Source: Charter'97 Press Center

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

Lukashenka's links (*Newsweek*, by Christian Caryl and Sandy L. Edry, February 13, 2003) — Belarus hasn't been in the limelight for a while — its appalling human-rights record and disinterest in democratic progress have largely isolated dictator Aleksandr Lukashenka. But Lukashenka's pariah status has ingratiated him with one world leader: Saddam Hussein. Now their relationship seems to be attracting Western attention once again.

In recent years Belarus has regularly exported goods to Iraq under the U.N. Oil-for-Food Program. But lately Washington has grown concerned that those commercial ties might be concealing a more sinister program: the transfer of illicit arms and technology. Particularly worrying for the U.S. government are the frequent " humanitarian flights" from the Belarus capital of Minsk to Baghdad. Such flights are permitted under the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the gulf war-as long as they don't contain any goods that might have military applications. U.S. officials suspect that the planes are in fact transporting forbidden arms-and even military experts-to Baghdad.

The Americans have long been complaining to the United Nations about notably vague freight manifests connected with the flights. (On occasion, the same manifests have even been resubmitted for different flights, with only the date changed.) Around two months ago U.S. patience snapped, and Washington appealed to the U.N. Sanctions Committee to prevent one of the flights from taking off. No one will disclose what America suspected was onboard, but the U.S. action did succeed in keeping the plane on the ground in Minsk for several hours before it was allowed to depart. And sources in Minsk say that recent passengers have included senior executives from some of the country's biggest Soviet-era arms factories. These companies include those that make military optics, tractor-trailers that can be used as mobile missile launchers and high-precision manufacturing equipment.

U.S. fears aren't entirely unjustified. Before they left Iraq in 1998, U.N. weapons inspectors found prohibited equipment from Belarus in Iraqi military installations. And last year the United States openly scolded Minsk for arms smuggling in breach of U.N. sanctions-as well as for training Iraqi air-defense officers in the use of Russian-made S-300 anti-aircraft missiles. Yet another U.S. concern is that Belarus may be serving as middleman for Russian weaponry that the Kremlin-or rogue firms in Russia wouldn't dare sell to Iraq openly. Leonid Kozik, one of the Belarus officials who traveled to Iraq last fall, also serves on the board of a Russian-Belarusian company that markets weapons from the two countries. Little Belarus, with its population of just 10 million, is one of the world's leading importers of Russian weaponry. The Bush administration has been eagerly watching for a link between Iraq and Al Qaeda. Now it seems the Lukashenka connection might be back on its radar.

Source: Radio Racyja, March 25, 2003

Lukashenko to Start Relations with West Anew (*Die Welt, Germany*, by Alexander Rahr, January 22,2003) — The West in its NATO and EU eastward expansion needs to pay greater attention to Belarus, for the collapse of Alexander Lukashenka's regime may be imminent. The dictator's rule in Belarus is still firm, but further deterioration of the human rights situation has been noted by Council of Europe, and Lukashenka's economic model, aimed at conserving Soviet socialism, has suffered a crushing defeat. The country's international isolation has worsened the situation.

Lukashenka needs the West, first of all, for personal survival. 'Special relations' with Russia are undergoing a deep crisis. For years, Lukashenka talked integration with Russia, in order to help him get additional subsidies from Russia to maintain his backward economy. In late summer of 2002, Putin created a sensation by proposing that Belarus join Russia according to the German model: six Belarusian regions should become regions of the Russian Federation.

Lukashenka protested at first but almost immediately retreated. Today, he no longer wants unification with Russia. He is under tremendous pressure to give up control over currency emission, and to privatize (some choice) state property that might then pass on to Russia. Shortly thereafter, the Russian energy giant Sibneft acquired the controlling packet of shares of Russian-Belarusian petroleum concern Slavneft.

Kremlin's pragmatism has driven Lukashenka into a corner. Moscow ruthlessly demands re-payment of huge debts, that in the 90's had (usually) been forgiven the 'brotherly Slavic' nation. When the Belarusian side pleaded for the reduction of customs tariffs, Moscow responded with a demand for putting Belarus' tax system in conformity with Russia's. This, however, is next to impossible due to the discrepancies that exist between the socialist system of Belarus, and the capitalist of Russia. Lukashenka proceeded to print more money, and worked out a plan which is supposed to raise the level of foreign investment by 50%, from the current $3 billion to $4.5 billion in 2003. Actively attracting Western entrepreneurs to acquire the privatized state property would help Lukashenka not to have to face the Russian oligarchs alone.

His most current problem is the recent lack of opportunity to act as Russia's anti-Western mouthpiece. According to opposition politician Anatol Lyabedzka, the pan-Slavic idea died after the September 11 events. If in the 90's Lukashenka could offer his country to the nationalistically minded Russian elite as a stronghold against the West, providing him with political and financial privileges, then after the start of cooperation between Putin and the West, this policy lost all sense.

In his relations with the West, Lukashenka changed his mind and made some concessions. He allowed the OSCE mission back into the country, and will, of necessity, have to resume the interrupted relations with the West. Nonetheless, one can hardly expect a radical change in his anti-Western policy.

Source: Charter 97 Press Center, January 22, 2003

BOOK REVIEWS

Contemporary Belarus — Between Democracy and Dictatorship

A book review by Vera Rich of Elena Korosteleva, Colin W. Lawson, and Rosalind J. Marsh (eds.), "Contemporary Belarus — Between Democracy and Dictatorship," Routledge/Curzon, London and New York, 2003, 201 pp. ISBN 0-7007-1613-0.

This book — yet another with a subtitle in the form "Belarus Between X and Y" — is based on papers from the conference "Belarus: the forgotten heart of Europe," which was held at the University of Bath in February 2000, plus an afterword covering the presidential elections of September 2001.

It is also, in some sense, derived from a two-year collaborative research project with academics from Belarusian State University, the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, and Moscow State University, which was funded by both INTAS and the British Academy, called "Comparative Analysis of Charismatic Leadership in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine: Its Emergence, Mobilization, and Sustainability." This latter research, we are told, provided the empirical grounds on which the research conclusions of the book are based.

The result is a high-powered academic collection, with almost all the contributors either currently holding academic posts or writing doctoral dissertations at Western or Belarusian universities. The exceptions are Teresa Dumasy ("Belarus's Relations with the European Union — a Western Perspective"), who at the time of writing was a senior research analyst on Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London and who is now at the British Embassy in Paris, and the eminent emigre Belarusian scholar, Jan Zaprudnik, now retired after a long stint with RFE/RL.

The individual papers consider Belarus from the viewpoint of such topics as "postcommunist authoritarianism," the "difficulties of elite formation," the development of political parties and their election platforms, "president and opposition," the consequences of late economic reforms, the Russia-Belarus Union, and Belarus' relations with foreign states.

Particularly valuable (especially to those who have only recently become involved in, or even aware of, Belarus) will be the papers "History and Politics in Post-Soviet Belarus" (David R. Marples, University of Alberta) and "Belarus in Search of National Identity" Between 1986 and 2000 (Zaprudnik).

To draw together the findings of the individual contributors, the editors provide a substantial introduction focusing in particular on economic problems, institutional and structural environments, the "paradoxical" nature of the Belarusian electorate, the "stability"¡ of the existing regime and the prospects of what might happen if it were overthrown, and how far Russia is prepared to bear the costs of "union" with Belarus.

Addressing the question implicit in the subtitle of the book, this introduction concludes that Belarus is not a "total dictatorship" since it "retains some aspects of a democratic state" but is rather an "elected dictatorship" possessing the "preconditions for democracy," though not democracy itself.

They further conclude that, "Belarus has arrived at a crossroads of transition: what lies ahead is either an irrevocable path to democracy or a slide backwards to dictatorship." During the three years since these papers were first presented in Bath, Belarus has shown little sign of firmly setting off on the path to democracy.

However, in spite of some worrying increases in authoritarianism and infringements of human and civil rights (notably the 2002 law on religion), the backward slide has not become inevitable, and the "preconditions for democracy" still exist. Belarus remains stuck at the crossroads, and in spite of its long gestation period, this book, and the findings of the individual papers, remain largely relevant today.

Some of the numerical data is, of course, now outdated, and some contributors exhibit a somewhat naive tendency to take official Belarusian statistics and the findings of "pro-presidential" opinion polls at their face value without further discussion.

Overall, however, the book provides a stimulating and challenging contribution to the study of contemporary Belarus.

Vera Rich is a London-based freelance researcher.

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, January 28, 2003

(**Editor's note.** We were pleasantly impressed by the correct transliteration of Belarusian proper names from the Cyrillic to the Latin script. The frequently used practice in Western works and the press of using the Russian versions was avoided. There were only few proofreader lapses with most involving the distinction between letters **g** and **h.**

A historical flaw appeared in the Introduction (p.3) under the heading: An overview of Belarus. The first sentence reads: "The Republic of Belarus declared independence ... for only the **second time in history**" (referring to the 1918 declaration as the first). Had the editors stated: ..."second time in **recent** history" they would have recognized the major, if not the dominant role that the Belarusian nation played historically in the multinational Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ruthenia, Samogitia, ...)

March 26, 2003
LUKASHENKA: FAIR INTEGRATION WITH BELARUS IS IMPORTANT.

Lukashenka told the *Nash sovremennik* journalists that the Russian leadership is profoundly mistaken if it believes that Belarus has no other option than "crawling into Russia" or "remaining under Russia's foot," Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka warned that if Russia refuses to integrate with Belarus on equal terms, Belarus might be quickly "picked up" by "you know who."

And the Belarusian leader added: "Speaking about the European Union and its enlargement with some post-socialist and post-Soviet countries, the nearest country, from the viewpoint of EU entry, is Belarus. Belarus means order, manageability, transparent economy, the lack of all those criminal elements, etc. This is how the West assesses us." (RFE/RL Newsline, March 27, 2003)

Belarusian, German Minorities in Poland's Political Life in 1989-99

A book review by Aleksander Maksymiuk of Alastair Rabagliati's *A Minority Vote. Participation of the German and Belarusian Minorities Within the Polish Political System 1989-1999*, Zaklad Wydawniczy Nomos, Krakow 2001, 408 pp.

The Belarusian minority in Poland has produced a variety of publications on its political activities in the period covered in Alastair Rabagliati's book. These publications include even students' textbooks. Unfortunately, all of them are in Belarusian or Polish, so any Western scholar interested in the life of Polish Belarusians would be put to the difficult task of mastering the two languages if he or she wanted to get some insight into the subject of his or her interest.

Therefore, the appearance of Rabagliati's insightful and comprehensive study of the political life of Polish Belarusians and of Polish Germans can only be welcomed by Western scholars and the two concerned minorities alike. The book casts a fascinating light on the two little-known minority communities that some 14 months from now will join the larger European Union community of nations and nationalities.

The book consists eight chapters. **Chapter 1** and **Chapter 2** discuss the concepts of national minorities and the political system in Poland, as well as the situation for national minorities in prewar Poland. **Chapter 3** deals with the situation in the German and Belarusian national minorities in the communist-era Polish People's Republic.

In prewar Poland, national minorities constituted one-third of the country's population, while on the eve of the collapse of communism in 1989, they amounted to only an estimated 3 percent of Polish citizens.

The next two chapters of the book view the emergence and development of the German and Belarusian minorities' political movements from 1989 to 1997. In this period, Poland saw four parliamentary elections (1989, 1991, 1993, 1997) and two local elections (1990, 1994). **Chapter 6** and **Chapter 7** are devoted to a detailed study of the 1998 local elections in the regions inhabited by both minorities. Rabagliati spent three years (1997-2000) in Poland, mostly in the Opole region of Silesia (the southwestern part of Poland, inhabited by the German minority) and the Bialystok region (the northeastern part of the country, where Belarusians live). In those regions, he met, and spoke with, a large number of national-minority activists, scholars, newspaper journalists (including the author of this review), minority schoolteachers, and politicians.

Chapter 8 summarizes the study by reviewing the reasons for the successes and failures of the two minorities and considering their future as political forces in the Polish political system. The political movements of the German and Belarusian minorities on the Polish political stage in 1989-99, as Rabagliati shows, developed in different ways.

The Germans managed to build strong subregional political structures based on a platform involving the remnants of pro-Germany sentiments and German identity, language, and culture. The general discontent with the Polish state and system among the minority, as well as the social and cultural ties of the community, assisted their political success. Polish Germans won seven seats in the Sejm in the 1991 parliamentary election and four seats in the 1993 elections. The decreasing support for German-minority candidates, Rabagliati observes, was primarily caused by the feeling that voters' interests could be better served by voting for a Polish party, which could represent their interests and be in better position to solve their economic problems.

As regards the Belarusian political movement, Rabagliati argues that, although it initially seemed to possess significant potential for political success, it has effectively failed to build strong social support following its emergence in 1989. In addition, the movement was almost immediately plagued by internecine wars. As early as in the 1991 parliamentary elections, there were already three separate forces vying for the same minority votes: the Belarusian Democratic Union based on a "nationalist" platform, the Polish postcommunists, and a third force based on a broad "Orthodox" platform that tended to promote a religious rather than ethnic identity in the Belarusian minority.

Rabagliati's book is profusely supplied with relevant numerical data (national censuses, election results) and photographs (minority activists, election posters). Moreover, apart from presenting political developments in the two minorities, it also offers a much broader picture of their civic efforts.

Rabagliati's study should become standard reading not only for readers interested exclusively in ethnic-minority problems but also for those who want to grasp the full meaning of postcommunist transformation in Eastern and Central Europe. Rabagliati's study makes a powerful point by asserting that the picture of postcommunist transition would be substantially incomplete without taking into account the political activity of ethnic groups in postcommunist countries.

This review was written by Aleksander Maksymiuk, senior editor of the Belarusian-language weekly Niva *in Bialystok, Poland.*

Source: RFE/RL Poland, Belarus and Ukraine Report, February 25, 2003

A Dubious Distinction

The *Parade Magazine* which forms a *Weekend* insert to many U.S. newspapers ran an intriguing feature article on February 16, 2003. It was titled "The 10 Worst Living Dictators". Its author is a veteran international journalist David Walechinsky.

In the company of Kim Jong Il of North Korea, King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Saddam Hussein, Muammar Qaddafi, Fidel Castro and few other African and Asian tyrants, is the youngest of them all at 48 – **Alexander Lukashenka** of Belarus. He occupies the 10th place, and has the dubious distinction of being known as Europe's last dictator.

LETTERS

THE PRIME MINISTER OF DENMARK

Copenhagen,
7 March 2003

Editor Joe Arciuch
P.O. Box 10353
Torrance CA 90505,
USA

Dear Mr. Arciuch,

Thank you for your letter of 18 November 2002 about the situation in Belarus.

I share your concern about the situation in Belarus, not least the situation of democracy and human rights. The EU has on several occasions expressed its serious concern about the development in Belarus. In November 2002 fourteen EU Member States decided to implement travel sanctions against President Lukashenko and seven high-ranking representatives of the Belarusian Government including the Prime Minister. The travel sanctions will not be lifted until the Belarusian authorities ensure the proper functioning of the OSCE office in Minsk.

The aim of the EU is to see Belarus take its place among European democratic countries, not least since Belarus will become a direct neighbour after the EU enlargement. The EU is in the process of formulating an ambitious, long term and integrated approach towards its new Eastern neighbours, including Belarus, with the objective of promoting democratic and economic reforms, sustainable development and trade.

Yours sincerely,
(signature)
Anders Fogh Rasmussen

(**Editor's note.** It appears that Lukashenka is winning the conflict with EU, OSCE. He admitted the OSCE office to Minsk only after its mandate was considerably weakened. As an apparent reward, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly seated his pocket legislature. In early March he stole still another election, and now EU is considering lifting the travel sanctions.

Furthermore, EU now appears ready to confirm Belarus as a future neighbor, rather than as a potential future member of the European Union. Will this not shut Belarus off from the rest of Europe, leaving it to the tender mercies of another neighbor, namely, Russia ?)

(**Additional clarification**. When our original letter was written last November, it was addressed to Mr. Rasmussen in his then capacity as the President of the European Union Council. His letter makes it clear that he responded accordingly, even though as a result of EU Council rotation, he no longer fills that position).

March 26, 2003

Dear friends,
I am part Belarusian and live now in San Francisco. My friends have written that Belavezha Pushcha, a unique natural preserve under UNESCO protection is in grave danger. Massive cutting of the primeval forest and commercial hunting of the variety of its animals is being considered. Now, all to whom nature's beauty and resources are dear, are writing letters to the President of Belarus and to the relevant Minister.
Join them by writing to President A.H. Lukashenka, Minsk, Republic of Belarus and to L.I. Kharuzhyk, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Minsk, Belarus and ask them to prevent this destruction.
Thanks in advance, Lidia Belknap

(**Editor's note.** Lidia provided a sample letter that can be copied and forwarded. She also provided a detailed description of the rich flora and fauna of Belavezha Pushcha, one of the last primeval forests in Europe. Both documents are in Russian)

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